

BLUEPRINT

The background is a vibrant, abstract collage. It features a person in a dark blue shirt in the foreground, a pink mask with orange and yellow patterns in the upper right, a pink silhouette of a person in the middle left, and various colorful shapes and patterns in shades of green, yellow, orange, and pink throughout.

Issue 5 | Volume 85 | February 2025

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Letter from the Editors

Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

We are thrilled to share *Blueprint*'s issue 5 and the paper's first print publication of 2025. In this issue, *Blueprint* covers many school events and student-led initiatives, including the first-ever "Survivor" rally, the annual Senior Breakfast, and the local multi-District Music Festival. In celebration of women's basketball Coach Scott Espinosa-Brown's life, *Blueprint* honors his decades of tireless contributions to the community in a coverage on page 39.

In our cover story, *Blueprint* explores the evolving landscape of attention spans and attendance in academic settings while examining its ties to decreasing student engagement. In addition to Acalanes teachers and students, *Blueprint* spoke to East Bay University Assistant Professor of Marketing Ivan Fedorenko and TikTok Data Engineer Adnan Shahpurwala to understand the complex relationship between digital sources and student cognition.

In an effort to uplift the voices of our graphics staff and fulfill our paper's mission, *Blueprint* introduces a page of opinion graphics on this issue covering false activism and climate change. *Blueprint* hopes readers welcome this initiative and that these graphics encourage open discussions.

As always, to submit a response to any story within our paper, scan the QR code to submit a letter to the editor through *Blueprint* Online. Please refer to page 2 for *Blueprint*'s mission statement. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Blueprint* and look forward to sharing more stories in the future.

Maya Agarwal & Avery Robb, Print Editors-in-Chief

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Behind the scenes of cover's art

Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

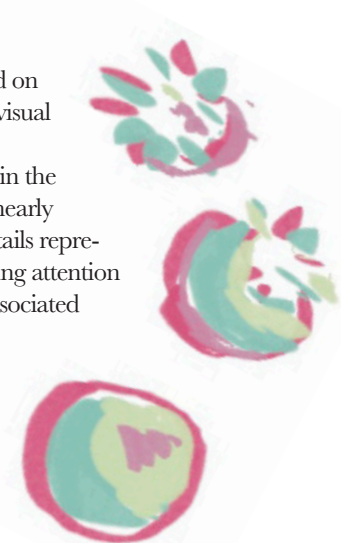
As the Heads of Graphics, it is our goal to capture the ideas of *Blueprint* articles effectively by portraying the pieces visually. For this issue's cover on the causes and effects of the changes in attention spans, we've attempted to recreate the feeling of the overwhelming amount of content the average student faces. We settled on not featuring an actual portrait of a student, but rather letting them fade into the background and allowing a visual representation of the content they consume to be the main focus.

On the cover, a maximalist mash of various symbols in fluorescent colors overwhelm the silhouette caught in the middle of it all. Within the jumble, you'll see a string of social media feed, several alerts vying for attention, a nearly empty hourglass, and a goldfish – consistent motifs throughout all our designs. The alerts and social media details represent the stimuli that students encounter. The goldfish and the hourglass are metaphors for the quickly shortening attention span. The draining sand equates one's attention to a literal timer, where the goldfish – an animal frequently associated with incapacity for complex or long term thought – stands for what the student's attention span is becoming.

To see more of our graphics for the cover story, turn to page 18.

Bo Chevaleau, Cade McAlister & Audrey Martin, Head of Graphics & Heads of Photography

Blueprint strives to uplift voices in our community with truth and transparency



NEWS



The Last One Standing

Acalanes students watch classmates compete in the winter "Survivor" rally

Mila Ellis and Maddie Obertello | Staff Writers

Photo by Mila Ellis

Eager voices scream and chant as students and faculty wait to see who takes the final chair as the winner. Finally, cheering erupts from the crowd as sophomore Adelyn Horciza is officially crowned the Acalanes sole survivor.

With four challenges, participants from all grades competed to be the winner of the Winter "Survivor" rally on Jan. 24. The competition featured battle after battle, as competitors were put to the test to show off their teamwork and school spirit.

Leadership's Rallies Board created this year's theme in order to build bonds between all students as teams were made up of participants from each grade.

"The main thing that differentiates this rally from the others is our pre-

selected teams, so we can have better grade integration in our rallies, which was one of our main goals this year," Rallies Board member and sophomore Ella Greenfield said.

Experimenting with a new approach, this rally introduced team-based and individual challenges, in an effort to strengthen audience engagement. Together, teams had to navigate an obstacle course, followed by a puzzle, tug of war, and finally, musical chairs.

"The structure of this rally started off with our usual entrance and class cheers, then we had two team games. After that, whichever team had the most points moved on to the finale. First, they participated in a 'Survivor'-themed food auction for advantages. Then they had a final individual compe-

tition to announce our winner," Rallies Board member and sophomore Gabby Huerta said.

Leadership also incorporated new features into the rally by creating challenges that build off of each other and earn points that contribute to a final score.

"We wanted to do something a little bit different and find a way to bring a new idea to a rally while also mixing up grade levels to make it less grade vs. grade. "Survivor" has been around for so long and is a fun way for people to compete together, while also competing individually," Activities Director Katherine Walton said.

Board members sifted through various ideas before landing on the "Survivor" rally. According to students, the additional time and consideration put into this specific rally encouraged competitor participation.

"I thought it would be a great opportunity to be able to do something with my friends from other grades, while also having fun and representing school spirit by having the enthusiasm to participate in ... school activities," participant and sophomore Ella Culbertson said.

Although only a small portion of the student body competed, the rally brought a broader theme of inclusivity across the school, regardless of whether it was in the stands or on the floor.

"Even though I didn't participate, I feel I had just as much fun as those who did," junior Maddie Bernstein said.

Some students may find themselves separated by grade level, so enhancing these existing bonding events can help to develop a more cohesive environment, connecting students with shared experiences, and participants with a common goal.

"You meet a lot of new people and you get to connect with classmates you've never met before and do new things," Horciza said.

By the end of the rally, many students felt that the rally helped strengthen school spirit and inter-grade connections for the rest of the year.

"I am so glad that I participated and proud of myself and everyone else. The experience was so much fun and I recommend it to every other student here," Culbertson said.

A Sizzling Start with the Senior Class

Seniors commune together at the annual senior breakfast

Owen Curley and Max Trexler | Staff Writers

Photos by Max Trexler

Spread by Molly Jones

Seniors filled up Chris Huber Memorial Gym bright and early, eager to kick off the day with a warm breakfast, laughter, and memories, with friends.

The Senior Class Officers, along with help from parent volunteers, organized the annual Senior Breakfast on Jan. 24 in the Chris Huber Memorial Gym, where seniors bonded over a meal of pancakes, bacon, breakfast desserts, fruit and more.

"Senior breakfast has always been a huge tradition for seniors, so it's kind of a milestone for us, halfway through the year, and we're about to graduate. So bonding before we all leave is important," Senior Class Treasurer JB Frolich said.

Parent volunteers also played a role in the event, providing food, drinks, and aid throughout the planning process so that the seniors could enjoy a morning filled with connection and enjoy the final stretch of high school.

"Bringing people together and celebrating the seniors as their time is coming to an end, and making the last few months fun is what we were striving for," parent volunteer Kirtsen Jeffery said.

Attendees not only appreciated the food, but also the chance to unwind and spend time with their peers.

"The pancakes and bacon were really good but my favorite part of the event was just being able to hang out with my friends and have a good time," attendee and senior Ariana Hallstrom said.

Many senior students look forward to this event not just for the pancakes but also the excitement that lies ahead for the graduating class.

"I think it does have an impact on the senior class because it's a great event to get everyone in the same space and hangout. We also [did] a raffle where seniors won things like prom tickets, gift cards, and stuff, that brings a lot of hype to [the event]," Senior Class President Jane Schrader said.

Overall, the event was one of many events to commemorate the growth of the senior class and share memories.

"As their senior year comes to a close, they value the opportunities to build memories with people in their class and that senior breakfast gives them an opportunity to have fun, be celebrated as seniors, and have time with one another," Activities Director Katherine Walton said.

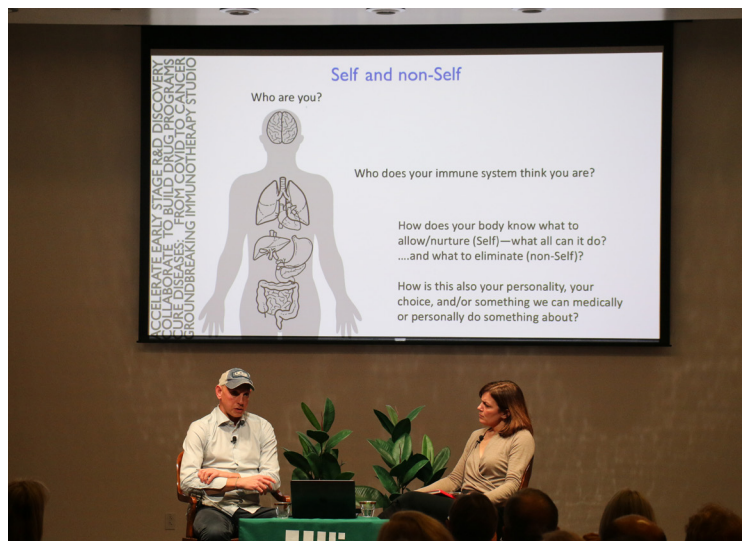


The Future of Cancer Research

*Lafayette library hosts local doctor leading research
in new cancer treatment*

Molly Jones, Tselmeg Orgilmunkh, and Audrey Tugade | Print Photo
Story Editor and Staff Writers

Photos by Molly Jones and Tselmeg Orgilmunkh



Few words carry as much weight and fear as “cancer,” a diagnosis often synonymous with uncertainty and loss. Yet, in the face of this pressing issue, Dr. Matthew Krummel and his immunotherapy research offer a new source of hope.

Dr. Krummel, a professor at the University of San Francisco (UCSF) and immunologist, held a lecture at the Lafayette library on Jan. 14 where he discussed his research on cancer and the future of both immunotherapy and cancer treatment.

Dr. Krummel has studied immunology for over 20 years and runs Krummel Labs in San Francisco, where he researches immune response and therapy.

Some people view the brain as the sole regulating organ and thus the most important part of the body. However, Dr. Krummel hopes people realize that other parts, like the immune system, have a significant impact on one’s health and that everything in the body is collaborative.

“One of the things I hoped that people take away [from my lecture] is a little bit of wonder that there’s a lot more beneath the surface, in this case, your body, and very specifically, im-

mune systems. I think the other critical part is the idea that you are this very large collaborative network of things,” Dr. Krummel said.

Health seems to be a growing priority among families, especially because of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, many Lafayette citizens expressed interest in educational conversations about science and health, which led to Dr. Krummel’s lecture.

“Science programs have always been of interest at the library. They were a top response on 2024 program surveys, too. Specifically, conversations dealing with health, wellness, and aging, especially post-pandemic,” Lafayette Library Development and Programs Manager Sarah Blumenfeld said.

Dr. Krummel began the lecture by explaining the importance of knowing one’s body and the interconnecting systems within it. He later discussed how specific human immune cells can distinguish between health and illness, including B cells, Natural Killer Cells, and T cells, all types of white blood cells that help the body fight infection and disease.

“Your immune cell basically is pulling a little tiny, tiny, tiny sample [of cells in

the body], almost like a biopsy ... and the cell remains healthy, but the immune system has just gathered information about who you are. What the immune system often is trying to do is to figure out what you are to keep you that thing tomorrow,” Dr. Krummel said.

Dr. Krummel also presented his research on how T cells help the body fight cancer, and how the different immune cells interact with diseases, viruses, and tumors. Their team worked with T cell brakes, which are molecular mechanisms that regulate the body’s immune response, to help prevent the immune system from attacking healthy cells. His ongoing research seeks to utilize the multifaceted immune system and explore how scientists can use it to help fight off diseases and tumors.

“So we discovered a brake. And essentially, the idea was that you could hit that brake, lock it, and then T cells would be more active. We are trying to understand the personalities of the immune system and the way we can trigger them,” Dr. Krummel said.

Many attendees went because of their interest in science and biotechnology. Seeing the effort and passion that goes into research could inspire others to foster a new interest.

“We all have to deal with immune system issues, and of course, we have people in our families who have had cancers or diabetes, and so it’s really interesting to learn more about [these issues] because they affect everyone,” attendee Sarah Bruschi said.

The event at the library brought together various local citizens, who gathered to learn more about the immune system and its implication on health. Many of the attendees were present, wanting to understand more about their health and bodies.

“The opportunity to speak with someone who’s knowledgeable and might offer them some answers and hope means a lot. That’s what the library is all about, is bringing the community together,” Blumenfeld said. “[It is important to have] a clearer understanding about the immune system, something that’s very complicated ... to get a little more insight into what’s going on inside our bodies.”

Dr. Krummel’s lecture created an opportunity for community members to

connect with the scientific community. By offering educational opportunities through lectures and events, the Lafayette library serves as a source of knowledge for the community.

"Libraries are the residue of this concept that society should help aggregate a source center for knowledge and try to distribute it. Whether [that is through] books [or] in these other forms, having these events is great," Dr. Krummel said.

Learning more information and having an understanding of the immune system can help others take better care of their health and their bodies.

"Knowing about the latest discoveries makes science something that is tangible and relevant to the public. It's relevant, immediate, and can hopefully generate more questions and more interest," Advanced Placement Biology and Living Earth teacher Lori Tewksbury said.



News Briefs

Club Day

Maddie Obertello | Staff Writer

Tables lined the front quad during Club Day at lunch on Jan. 29 as different students showcased their clubs, attracting other students with informational boards and treats.

This semi-annual event introduced 21 new clubs to the Acalanes campus this semester. The event included club booths, treats for participation, and clubs showing off their mission statements to help students learn more about each group.

With club applications due the previous week, presidents and officers prepare for this event in hopes of recruiting new members. Allowing students to join on the spot creates an encouraging environment where students can explore various interests.

Club Day provides an outlet for students to create or join a supportive group, connecting on a topic that they are passionate about. It also allows students to explore new interests and expand their involvement in the school community.

Class Cup Family Feud

Mila Ellis | Staff Writer

Students put their game faces on as they entered the Chris Huber Memorial Gym, ready to face off in an Acalanes Family Feud competition, winning points for both their teams and grades.

In a similar fashion to the original Family Feud, the Associated Student Body (ASB) Officers sent out a survey and numerous polls to students. They created local twists on the questions to make the game Acalanes themed.

During the games, teams of five students from each grade competed against the other grades. Juniors and seniors faced off on Monday, Jan. 13 and the seniors came out on top. The second match took place on Wednesday, Jan. 15 where the frosh beat the sophomores, moving on to the championship round. Finally, on Friday, Jan. 22 the frosh emerged victorious against the seniors.

Their win propelled the frosh in the Class Cup ranks. As it stands, the seniors are leading with 800 points, followed by a 750-point tie between the juniors and frosh, and lastly the sophomores in last place with 550 points.

DEIB Debrief

Zinnia Khan | DEIB Director

Black Excellence Month

Every year, the U.S. Government recognizes February as Black History Month. Former President Biden's 2024 Black History Month proclamation stated, "National Black History Month serves as both a celebration and a powerful reminder that Black history is American history, Black culture is American culture, and Black stories are essential to the ongoing story of America." The Trump administration has since removed all previous Black History Month addresses from the White House website, and it remains to be seen whether they will acknowledge the month this year.

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) chose to deem February "Black Excellence Month," rather than "Black History Month," in an effort to avoid separating the contributions of Black people from American history.

"Black history is inseparable from American history, but Black history has often been erased, minimized, or told through a biased lens. Now, students are not properly educated on the true contributions of African Americans throughout history, as their work has been credited to white folk, and the common history curriculum favors teaching that side of history," Black Student Union (BSU) Co-President and junior Ash Dawkins said.

To celebrate Black Excellence Month, BSU is hosting a collaboration event on Feb. 21 with the Feminism Club to have a screening of the award-winning film *Hidden Figures* to spotlight Black women's accomplishments and contributions to science. A potluck before the film will introduce students to new foods. During school, BSU will have meetings every Wednesday in room 314, and a speaker event on Friday Feb. 7. Lastly, they will end the month at the district-wide annual BSU dance at Las Lomas, themed "Quad City."

Lunar New Year

Lunar New Year celebrates the start of the Lunar Calendar year, typically falling between Jan. 21 and Feb. 20. This year it fell on Jan. 29. It is one of the most important holidays in many East and Southeast Asian cultures, as the festival celebrates family reunions, honoring ancestors, and wishing for prosperity in the year ahead. Common customs include shared meals, gift-giving, dragon and lion dances, and gifting red envelopes containing money called "Hóngbāo" that symbolize good luck and fortune. Each year is associated with one of twelve zodiac animals, this year representing the year of the snake.

On the Acalanes campus, many students celebrated the Lunar New Year by attending events such as the Asian Student Union's (ASU) Lunar New Year Potluck. The potluck focused on highlighting the multiculturalism of Lunar New Year, and cultural appreciation among attendees.

"This year, specifically, we've been focusing on highlighting more Asian cultures including both South and North Asian cultures. I think a lot of our members enjoy being somewhere where they can appreciate their culture or learn about new ones," ASU Co-President and senior Sabrina Koo said.

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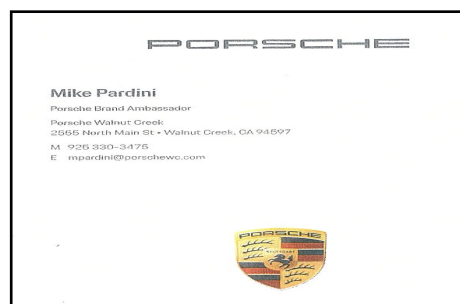
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FEATURE



College Changes: Scores to Skills

Exploring the benefits and challenges of competency-based education

Mika Katznelson, Sela Sarbiewski, Sydney Scovic,
and Samantha Swift | Staff Writers

Graphics by Bo Chevaleau

Imagine a familiar feeling for many – butterflies in the stomach, a nervous bounce of the knee as one anxiously awaits an exam to be placed in front of them. Then, staring at an endless stream of answer bubbles, their hands shake as they begin to fill in answers. This is the reality for most students across the country, but that may be changing.

Across California, eight community colleges are participating in a pilot program for competency-based education (CBE) intending to improve teaching and learning for all students by allowing students to demonstrate skills, rather than take more traditional exams.

For this program, students are left to their own devices when completing the class. While the rigor varies among each program, most allow students to work at their own pace and individualize their timelines. Courses may be the traditional

quarter, or extend as long as students need to earn credit. To do so, students must prove competency in a set of skills.

“Direct assessment programs do not use time as a measure of learning but instead use demonstration of mastery of a competency,” Southwestern College Curriculum Faculty Chair, English and Education Professor, and CBE co-lead Randy Beach said.

CBE students must graduate their courses with at least an eighty percent mastery of their skill, whereas the conventional major requires a C average. While the measure for ‘mastery’ varies among each subject, there is usually a general marker the teacher determines.

The program personalizes the teaching ways to meet the needs of each student through a self-determined pace and extensive practice questions to prove mastery.

“While CBE attempts to do away with instruction focused on measurable objectives within specified timeframes, competencies are equally difficult to define [and] assess even within a more self-paced, individualized instruction model like CBE,” Head Instructor at Ability Now Bay Area Dr. Laura Harrison said.

The time frame is regulated by teachers, and they choose the bar for mastery that their students must reach. This concept is not new, however prior to this point, it has not been common in higher education settings.

“If you were working one on one with the student, teaching the piano or golf or [the] flute, you could say, ‘I’m not gonna let you go onto book number two until you can play all the songs from book number one’ which is very reasonable so people do that a lot. But it is almost unheard of in higher education,” University of California Berkeley Computer Science Professor Dr. Dan Garcia said.

To further the flexible time frame, participating community colleges create assessments to test competency at developed skills, with the hope that students will not have to cram material that promotes short-term learning.

“We’ve all been used to having grades A to F, that’s how we are raised in our system. But there are so many other kids I’ve even come across ... that learn differently,” College Consultant and Acalanes parent Anna Eppinger said.

CBE has presented a different way of learning for the schools that are partaking in the program. How the curriculum is presented and paced can be personalized based on the students.

“Some kids, or adults in some cases, that are going through this don’t necessarily do well with timing pressure when testing and so forth. [CBE] is based on their own timetable and how they’re understanding,” Eppinger said.

This idea of equity for all students is the foundation for CBE. Even though the concern for equality is widespread among schools today, experts argue that current policies in place are not always fair to all.

“Extra credit, they say, is not equitable because extra credit is often fulfilled by students who have a lot of time. A lot of the students in the low end of the socio-economic spectrum don’t have that extra time to do the extra credit so it’s adding more work for kids who already don’t have the time to do the existing work



that is assigned to them," Dr. Garcia said.

The self-paced curriculum in CBE may interest busy students who may have little time to attend a university and allow them to move more quickly through courses.

"Some students that want to go to college have no time and they're working a job. Now they can do this at their own pace. Maybe learn a skill set that is going to give them an edge for a career ... They're actually learning specific skills that they can improve their worth as an employee," Eppinger said.

The main focus of the program is to establish fundamentals so that in future courses and jobs, students have a grasp of different concepts.

"When students graduate and look for work, employers want to know if they have certain skills. They're less concerned with how long it took to build the skill or what grade they got," Senior Dean of Career and Community Partnerships at Diablo Valley College (DVC) Dr. Beth Arman said.

However, the flexibility of competency-based education is also cause for concern, according to those who believe students can develop poor time management skills by exploiting the system.

"Half of the class is not doing the work because they can make up the material at a later date since it doesn't matter when they master the material or do the exercises," Acalanes Social Studies Department Chair and teacher Joseph Schottland said.

Alternatively, CBE can have positive effects on students' mental health. The program's personalized flexibility contrasts with institutional education so that students may be more open-minded to

learning.

"I think the more important aspect of [CBE] is mentally, [students] feel like they're succeeding in some way, and I feel that mental health of 'I'm okay, I'm a different learner, and I'm still gonna get a degree'. I think that really speaks volumes with the mental health of these kids that aren't traditional learners. That's kind of the underlying theme that I think has value that maybe not everyone's really noticing," Eppinger said.

This program is not currently offered at the local community college, DVC, that some former Acalanes students attend. However, when asked about CBE, DVC students consider the emphasis of a slower curriculum and demonstration of specific skills as a benefit. Considering the potentially slower and more individualized nature of this program, people may find a greater understanding of subjects as a whole.

"If [CBE] were implemented at DVC, I know for certain subjects that I am weaker at, such as math, it would take me a lot longer to progress through the curriculum, but I know I would be more confident in that subject by the time I moved on in what I was working on," DVC sophomore Avery Burton said.

Students also believe that this program can benefit their future careers by filling any gaps in their knowledge that they will later need to access.

"If I were to become a doctor in the future, I'd prefer to have full knowledge and mastery in that subject before moving on to a future subject that could be more demanding than the previous one," DVC student Ellis Diaz said.

However, many people still have concerns about how this program will affect students' readiness for future jobs, as they have the ability to resubmit assignments and retake tests at the teacher's discretion. Some question if setting a false standard will impact the futures of students as they move into professional settings.

"You can make the argument that in the real world you submit drafts and redrafts, so this is preparing for that. However, that argument doesn't hold. When I was a lawyer, I submitted a brief, and I didn't get several opportunities to submit that brief to the judge, I got one opportunity and that was it. As a practical matter, teachers would be regrading essays on

a constant basis, from two weeks ago to two months ago, constantly relooking at material. I don't think they have the kind of capacity to do that," Schottland said.

As CBE requires students to master their skills, there is additional concern about potential grade inflation from this program, considering the already rigorous nature of college applications and jobs. Some believe the competency-based program can threaten competition in the real world.

"Already there is the element of grade inflation, if everyone at Acalanes is getting an A, how worthwhile will that A be? Even coming out of college, if you are Google and you are looking at all of these transcripts and it is all A's, how do you know who to choose," Schottland said.

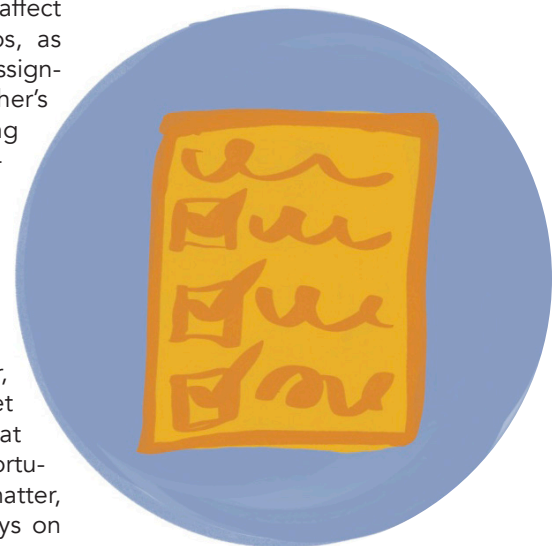
Despite concerns from many, the appeal of focusing on career-specific skills brings many students in when weighing the difference between a CBE and a standard degree.

"I think it would be great to concentrate solely on my specific skill rather than taking filler general education classes that are simply required for graduation credits," junior Charlotte Gellman said.

While some students see skill-based education as an opportunity to focus on their passions, others worry about the pressure of committing to one career path.

"I think it would be scary to pick a single skill to focus on, especially if I wasn't a hundred percent sure, and now I have focused all my time and effort into that," junior Kate Uffleman said.

Continued on 15



The Script for Restoration

The Park Theater Trust begins renovating the Lafayette Park Theater

Jack Gebhardt, Tatum McElhattan, and Neve Murphy | Head Copy Editor,
Print Arts Editor, and Print Opinion Editor

Rendering by Arcsine Architecture



After decades of locked doors and boarded windows, architects, film enthusiasts, and dedicated community members knock the dust off Lafayette's historic landmark, the Lafayette Park Theater.

The Park Theater Trust (TPTT) began renovating the Lafayette Park Theater located in the Lafayette Plaza in January 2025. The theater, closed since Sept. 18, 2005, is set to be rehabilitated in a manner that preserves its art deco style while modernizing its cinema experience for many Lafayette residents to visit.

The Park Theater Cinema opened in 1941, with a simple but classic design filled with maroons, ivories, and blues. Designed by famous cinema architect William B. David, the theater was considered modern and streamlined for its time. Its opening film, "Hold that Ghost," drew crowds from the enthusiastic town.

Former owner Allen Michaan sold the property in 2005, leading to its closure that same year. The theater seemed no longer profitable due to competition from larger and more modern cinemas in Walnut Creek and other neighboring towns.

"Honestly, the theater itself wasn't that great. Having a theater in Lafayette was a good thing, but the Park Theater was old and not well-maintained at the time. The floors were sticky from spilled sodas and gum, the seats were old and dirty, and ... we didn't get many of the big first-run movies... Once we could drive, we were going to movies in Walnut Creek or

Pleasant Hill," long-time Lafayette resident Chris Hession said.

Following its closure, the city wrestled with what to do with the property, and struggled to find someone interested in reopening the theater.

"The city entertained the idea of actually purchasing the theater, but they really didn't want to be in the movie theater business, for all the right reasons. That's not their role. Over the years, from that time on, there were different businesses looking at it, but nobody was really looking to open the theater. Everybody wanted to keep the marquee but with the rest of the building, they didn't really know what to do," Chief Financial Officer and Marketing and Community Outreach Chair of TPTT Tracy Farrell said.

Despite the lack of economic interest in the theater, the community remained dedicated to preserving the attraction. Lafayette residents consistently listed reopening the theater as a top priority on community surveys since its closure.

Their support led the city to create a task force assigned to reopening the theater.

In April 2019, members of the task force founded the nonprofit TPTT. The trust initially operated through the support of the Lafayette Community Foundation, a committee dedicated to connecting nonprofit organizations with donors and other sources of funding. In February 2020, the trust's board of directors were able to acquire 501(c)(3) status, which allowed them to raise their own funds.

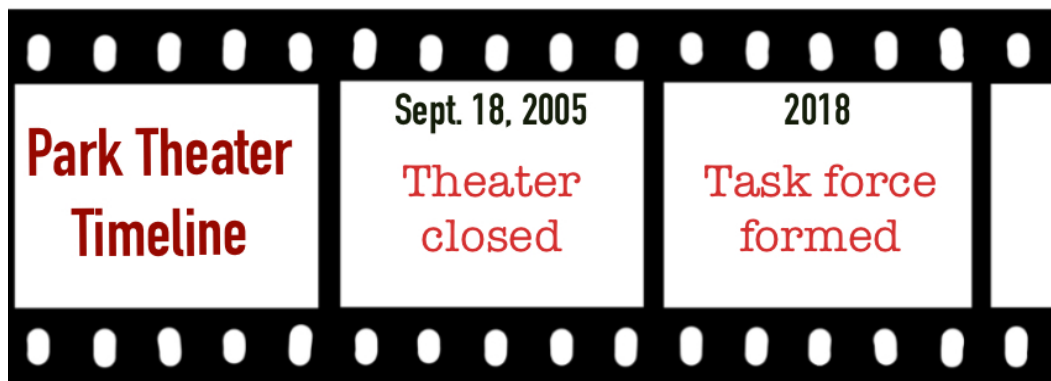
"The board of trustees is an all-volunteer board. Our sole mission is to first purchase and preserve the theater for the community of Lafayette and the East Bay, and then to generate funds and raise enough money to refurbish the theater in a newly envisioned way," President of the Board of Directors of TPTT Kathy Bowles said.

TPTT's first task was evaluating the feasibility of reopening the theater. They attended community meetings to assess the different legal hurdles they would face and the community's interests. Lastly, they had a structural engineer evaluate the integrity of the building, discovering that it had redwood beam framing and that much of the original architecture could be preserved.

Additionally, the trust has made the community an active member of the renovation process and attempted to fit their design plans to what the community wants for this property.

"Even before we formed the 501(c)(3), ... the task force went to various organizations, different businesses, the [Lafayette Chamber of Commerce], the city, the rotary clubs, [and] the senior community and said, 'What do you want if we reopen? Do you want a movie theater? Do you want a community center? What do you want?' So from the very start, we got a lot of buy-in from the community and businesses," Bowles said.

TPTT's next task was purchasing the



building so they could begin renovations. They originally wrestled with funding struggles and explored the best way to purchase the building.

"[In] December of 2019, an angel buyer ... came to us - he's a member of the community - [and] said, 'I think I can help you out. I will buy the building. I will give you a very favorable long term lease, you can reopen, we'll renovate together and then you can buy it back for me over the course of 10 [to] 15 years,'" Farrell said.

As COVID-19 hit and businesses were facing closures to adhere to quarantine policies, the property proved to be a poor investment for the angel buyer and he did not make the purchase. The trust began seeking funding through local and city-level sources to purchase the building on their own. On Aug. 31, 2021, the trust finally raised enough funds to purchase the theater for over three million dollars, with the help of the City of Lafayette, which contributed a \$500,000 donation to the trust and its cause.

"It's been a great partnership. The Park Theater Trust is really a group of people who love the theater, who live in Lafayette. It's a non-profit, so their goal is to revitalize the theater and make it a community asset. We all want to see the park theater open and so we're trying to do our best to help that happen," Lafayette City Manager Niroop Srivatsa said.

The community has not only been actively involved in the planning process but is responsible for a large part of the funding. Many local businesses have stepped up to host events and make donations to the trust. Additionally, TPTT has hosted numerous events to raise awareness and fundraise for the theater.

"[For] the past couple of years, when the community and the Chamber [of Commerce] does the Trick or Treat Street where the kids are coming up and down [Downtown Lafayette], we've been giving away free popcorn. We opened up

the lobby. We popped popcorn for three hours and we gave away close to 1,100 bags of popcorn ... When they've done the Rock the Plaza concerts on Friday nights, we have a little portable popcorn machine, and so we're constantly out there trying to keep the community engaged in this big old building that's dark and decaying," Farrell said.

Members of the Acalanes community are also invested in the reopening of this theater. Students formed the Park Theater Booster Club to spread awareness and aid in fundraising efforts.

"We are a group of students who work with the Park Theater trust to spread awareness, mostly around Acalanes, about their renovations. We put up posters, give out flyers, we are working to set up some sort of movie night or event at Acalanes. Students from the club will help out at Park Theater Trust events. They will help out at [the] Rock the Plaza events and usually we will operate the popcorn machine," President of the Park Theater Boosters Club and senior Julia Johnson said.

The trust began renovations in January 2025 and plans to extend the theater towards the back, making room for another theater. Additionally, they are striving to make the theater a place for the community to gather and not just watch movies by providing space and sound accommodations for concerts, community events, and more.

"There's going to be two theaters, one that's 49 seats, and the other one at about 150. We will be able to show both film and digital [movies]. Usually mostly movie theaters now just show digital, but we could show old films. There will be wonderful food. We have a commercial kitchen, so they'll be able to have a lot of wonderful concessions. There is, most importantly, a rooftop terrace, so that's Lafayette's first rooftop terrace, where there will be a rooftop bar. There's also

a community space so that ... people can hold birthday parties. They can have meetings there. It will be a multi-purpose place for the community," Bowles said.

Despite changes to the interior the trust plans on making, the exterior and style of the building will remain mostly the same in order to preserve some of the original architecture.

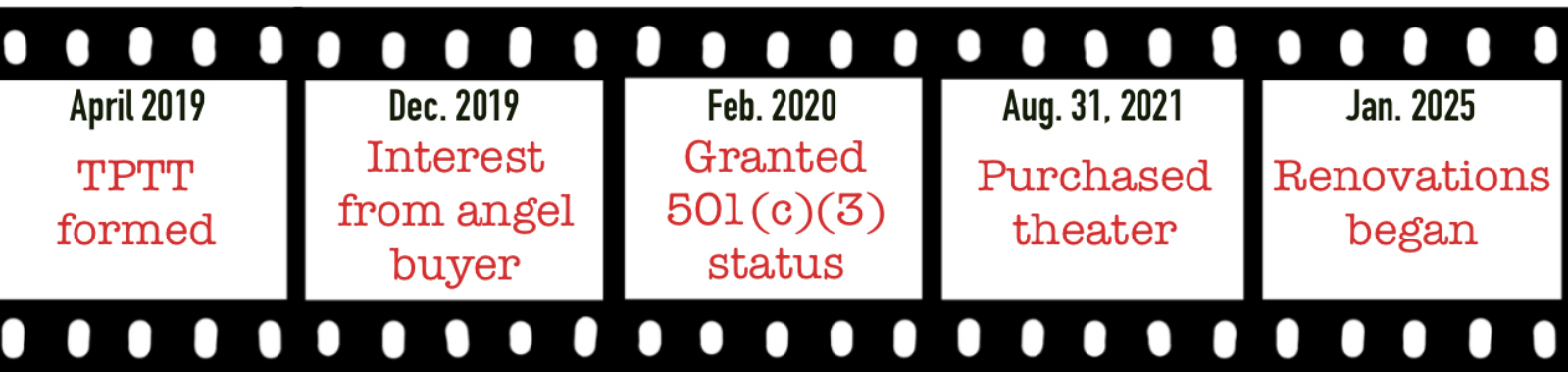
"We are refurbishing the marquee with its very unusual neon. Even before we purchased the theater for the community, we had a neon expert come in and take a look. The exterior will stay very much the same. The interior really will be completely different, although, it will harken back to kind of the Art Deco, streamlined, modern origins of the theater. We are refurbishing and keeping these beautiful sconces that will show up in the new theater, as well as some other lighting," Bowles said.

Once the renovations are complete and the theater is operating, TPTT plans to hand the theater over to CinemaSF, an independent company that runs many theaters in the Bay Area including the Balboa, the Vogue, and the 4-Star. Additionally, the company runs various accommodative events for certain groups and community members.

"We were just blown away by the fact that [CinemaSF] does special programming for Alzheimer's patients. They do special programming for kids [with autism]. They work with young moms. They'll turn the lights down and the music down so the babies can sleep and the moms can chat and eat popcorn. They just do a lot of community-focused things. They have a terrific staff. They have a tremendous amount of experience," Farrell said.

For some long-term Lafayette residents, the reopening of the historic theater holds sentimental importance.

"The marquee, with its beautiful Murano glass to tubing from Italy has a re-



ally warm, wonderful glow to it. I've been in Lafayette close to 40 years. I raised my three kids here, and we used to go to the theater all the time. I took them to birthday parties. My husband and I would go for date nights. We'd go with friends. It was a real center of community, and that Marquee lit up was very welcoming. [It] just was a feel good vibe kind of thing. Personally, it's meaningful to me because it is a center of community, and that's what Lafayette is all about. It's meaningful to me because of the joy I had taking my kids there and watching my kids see their friends there, hang out with their friends there, go on their little dates there," Farrell said.

Other community members and students recognize the importance that the park theater has served Lafayette and its generational citizens for over 80 years.

"The theater is kind of a hallmark of our town. When you search up Lafayette it's definitely one of the pictures that comes up and I just think it'd be awesome to have it actually working rather than just sitting there. It's been around since both my parents and grandparents have been here and it was a big part of their childhood so it'll be exciting for them to see it come back to life," third-generation Lafayette citizen and senior Addie McShane said.

The trust also believes the theater will serve as a center for community and social gatherings.

"The goal [for] the movie theater is [that] the movies be very event-based, very social, [and] a lot of fun. There will be ... some arthouse movies. There'll be 80s retrospective movies, the kind of [movies] where you might dress up, [there] might be singalongs, you might have a band beforehand, you might have a lunch before the movie. The goal is not to compete with watching Netflix at home. It's a fun community event and a great chance to get out [and] meet your neighbors," City Councilman and Member of the Boards of Directors of TPTT John McCormick said.

In addition to its social benefits, TPTT also expects the theater to bring several economic benefits to the area as it may attract customers to the general down-



Rendering by Arcsine Architecture

town area.

"The impact of a small regional cinema or local theater like this is significant on the surrounding businesses. It's a magnet. It brings business to the community. It brings jobs to the community. It brings culture to the community. So there's a multi-layered aspect, and particularly since the pandemic where so many businesses were hurt, anything that we can do to keep Lafayette" Farrell said.

Neighboring businesses, such as the Assistance League Shop, also recognize the possible benefits that re-opening the theater could bring to the stores and restaurants near the Lafayette Plaza.

"It will raise awareness of our store [since] we may not be open when people are coming to the theater, but they will walk past and see our windows and say 'oh, what a cute little shop. Oh, look at this, I'll come back when they're open on Tuesday.' It's really been a rewarding experience to see the support that they've gotten and since we deal in vintage and used things, we have in our heart a strong feeling of rescuing and restoring things. It's good to see it's happening," President of Assistance League-Diablo Valley Arlita Smith said.

The theater, being only a couple miles from the Acalanes campus, may provide a gathering place as well as job opportunities for Acalanes students. The City plans to hold activities designated for the community's youth.

"When it came time to buy the building, the City contributed \$500,000 towards the purchase, and in return for that, we will be offering free programming to

kids, seniors, and youth. There'll be a certain number of hours set aside every month for the city to use in exchange for their contribution," Farrell said.

The theater strives to showcase the talent of the community by providing open mic nights for students interested in music and comedy. The theater is also designed to play independent films in addition to typical movies.

"I believe there are classes where people are... creating their own films, yet to be able to Show those films in a real theater is very difficult, and we are committed. We are committed to being that venue to highlight students' work," Bowles said.

As of January 2025, the theater has raised \$10 million toward their funding goal of \$12 million and are still actively fundraising. The trust hopes to open the theater in 2026, which would rejoin the group of local Lamorinda theaters such as Rheem Theater in Moraga and Orinda Theater in Orinda. If achieved, many Lafayette citizens might be able to rejoice the opening of the theater and bring back a flood of memories from the past.

"I'm just looking forward to the day when it opens. I envision families coming to catch a movie, go out for dinner, maybe play at the plaza and just enjoy everything that Downtown Lafayette has to offer. I can't wait to take my very grown-up sons back to the Park Theater. The last time they were there, they were in middle school. So for me, it will be just going back in time and enjoying a movie together," Srivatsa said.



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Community Colleges

Continued from 11

The thought of CBE brings in mixed expectations, with some feeling uncertain about the narrow skill focus while others believe it will open career opportunities.

"I think a skill-based degree would really help me have a leg up when ap-

plying for a job because I would already have extensive knowledge and experience in my field," Gellman said.

Overall, CBE currently poses a variety of pros and cons for college students. However, many involved in the program hope to see this model of education succeed despite its challenges.

"Overly narrow and historically ableist definitions of 'competency' and 'mas-

tery' in institutions of learning are one concern, while the limited capacity of already overworked teachers to implement CBE in existing classrooms is yet another. However, moving education models toward greater individualization, personalization, and differentiation is an important transition in the effort to create greater equity and access to education for all," Dr. Harrison said.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BRIEFS

Sameed Marco and Saaj Shah | Online Content Manager and Online Editor

City Council

The Lafayette City Council held its bimonthly meetings on Jan. 13 and Jan. 27. The public can access the meeting's minutes, agenda, and audio on the City of Lafayette website, and the Council posts a livestream of the meeting on the City of Lafayette's Youtube channel. Community members can also virtually join the meeting on Zoom through the city website. For the meetings, the council opened with a closed session followed by public comments.

On Jan. 13, City Manager Niroop Srivatsa gave an update on the implementation of Measure H, the half-cent sales tax passed in November of last year. The tax is estimated to bring in \$2.4 million per year but will only cover city services at their current level. Along with this, Srivatsa presented budget changes adopted by the Council in June. The budget uses the American Rescue Plan Act funds to aid the city in meeting general fund reserve requirements in 2025 and 2026. The council adjourned the meeting after approving the consent calendar.

During the Jan. 27 meeting, the new leader of the Diversity Equity Inclusion Belonging (DEIB) committee Steven Poling announced two events: a community walk on Feb. 1 and a book club on Feb. 27.

City Administrator Jenifer Wakeman then gave a presentation on the Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. The report focused on how the city was in a strong financial position and intended to be debt-free in 2025 by being conservative with its spending. The report also highlighted that 2024 was a return to pre-pandemic operations but was strained by large one-time transactions. The city has a strong base financially for 2025 with \$3.5 million in surplus revenues. The council adjourned after approving the consent calendar.

Governing Board

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board held a meeting on Jan. 15. Student representatives from all five schools provided updates on recent site events and activities during the Governing Board meeting. Following their presentations, Governing Board members shared updates on district-wide changes and initiatives. The meeting was open to the public, who could attend either in person or via a live broadcast on the AUHSD website.

Jake Donohoe and Amanda Renno, Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) from Campolindo High School, presented on the Grade Level Collaboration Meetings that teachers participated in during the 2024-2025 school year. They discussed the origins and structure of the meetings, outlined their purpose and functionality, and shared staff feedback on the process. Additionally, they reviewed the data used to monitor the program's effectiveness, offering insights into its impact.

In December 2024, True North Research conducted a community poll to gauge support for a potential parcel tax measure designed to address the District's budget challenges and the declining purchasing power of the 2010 parcel tax. During the meeting, the poll findings were presented, and representatives from Team CivX outlined the process for pursuing such a measure. The Governing Board then discussed possible next steps in response to the findings.

AUHSD staff also provided an update on the Governor's Preliminary Budget Proposal for the 2025-2026 fiscal year, which was released on Jan. 10, 2025. They discussed the projected implications of the proposal for the AUHSD. The presentation for this agenda item had been posted before the meeting to ensure accessibility to stakeholders.

Lastly, in compliance with the Williams lawsuit settlement, staff reported that the District had posted the required notices in every classroom and summarized complaint data quarterly. For the period ending Dec. 31, 2024, no complaints had been filed, as documented in the Williams Quarterly Report attachment.

Connelly's Corner: Free Speech or National Security?

Exploring the implications of the TikTok App ban and the subsequent federal action

Molly Connelly | Print Feature Editor

Spread by Hank Bauer

“We are working to restore our services in the U.S. as soon as possible ... please stay tuned” appeared on the phone screens of over 167.5 million Americans who used TikTok on the evening of Jan. 18, 2025, which remained nonfunctional for approximately 14 hours.

On Jan. 17, 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously upheld a federal law requiring ByteDance, TikTok's China-based parent company, to divest its ownership of the app by Jan. 19 or face a ban in the United States. This was upheld under the argument that the app was a threat to national security due to concerns that ByteDance was selling user data to the Chinese government.

ByteDance made it clear that they have no intention of selling the company, and despite bringing their case to the Supreme Court, are seemingly at an impasse with the federal government.

With this ban, TikTok would not have been available to download or update on any device within any region of the United States. This would have allowed TikTok to remain functional in the U.S. until it eventually broke due to a lack of updates.

However, TikTok chose to go dark on Jan. 18, the evening before the ban was supposed to take effect. India banned TikTok and other ByteDance Apps in June 2020, with TikTok similarly choosing to go dark, rather than wait for the app to become nonfunctional.

the message that it had restored access “as a result of President Trump's efforts,” despite President Trump not yet being in office during the ban or the restoration.

On Monday, Jan. 20, President Trump signed an executive order that instructed his justice department to not enforce the law for 75 days, as he sought to give his administration “an opportunity to determine the appropriate course forward in an orderly way that protects national security while avoiding an abrupt shutdown.”

An executive order is a directive issued by the president that manages the operations of the federal government designed to direct federal agencies in how they enforce laws or policies. This does not require approval from Congress and is legally binding unless overturned by the courts.

In President Trump's first term, he issued 220 executive orders. He continued this trend in the first days of his new administration by signing over 20 executive orders on day one, breaking the record for most executive orders signed on his first day in office.

Under President Trump's proposed 75-day extension, it remains illegal for U.S. companies to maintain, distribute, and update TikTok while the company remains owned by ByteDance. This executive order allows companies to break this law under the assumption that they will not face consequences.

If the law was enforced, companies would be fined up to 5,000 dollars for each user that downloaded or updated TikTok. Distributed among different companies, the total number of fines for the 170 million Americans would total 850 billion dollars.

The fate of TikTok and the enforcement of this ban may prove to be complex for American companies who have to follow the law, while they seek to have an app that over half of the country uses. University of Minnesota law professor Alan Rozenshtein published in *Lawfare* that President Trump's assurances to not enforce the law “offer minimal security for

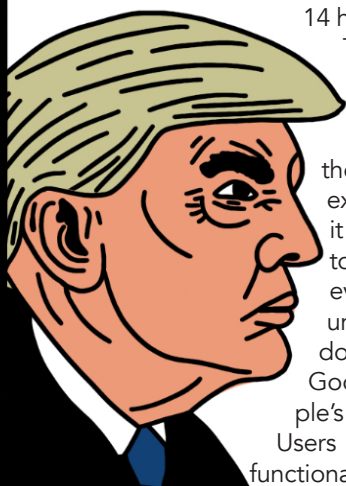
companies that violate it by restoring access to TikTok” and added that “Trump could change his mind at any time or selectively enforce the policy against the companies that have fallen from political favor.”

President Trump has said that he has a “warm spot for TikTok” and wants to “save” a platform that has generated “billions of views.” However, his views on the app are not consistent with his first term in office. In an executive order that he issued in Aug. 2020, he stated that “this data collection threatens to allow the Chinese Communist Party access to Americans’ personal and proprietary information – potentially allowing China to track the locations of Federal employees and contractors, build dossiers of personal information for blackmail, and conduct corporate espionage.”

The order was blocked by a federal judge and dropped by the Biden Administration.

Looking to the future, the Trump Administration has expressed interest in a U.S.-based company to oversee TikTok, while ByteDance would be a minority shareholder in the company.

As the legal battle over TikTok continues, American companies and users remain caught in the crossfire between shifting political agendas and national security concerns. Whether TikTok's future in the U.S. will be secured through a sale, further legal challenges or another executive order remains uncertain.



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ATTENTION UNDER ATTACK

The impact of decreasing attention spans on student engagement and culture

Aamena Shipchandler, Gwyneth Lee, and Audrey Tugade | Print News Editor and Staff Writers

Spread by Bo Chevaleau

As viral clips and endless streams of short, engaging videos dominate students' screens with every swipe, the pull of digital distractions continues to grow stronger. In this digital age, schools grapple with the challenge of keeping students focused and present in the classroom.

In recent years, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of digital technology, shorter attention spans and lower school attendance rates have become more common, indicating a broader trend of declining student engagement.

According to a Microsoft survey in Canada, the average attention span has shortened from 12 seconds in 2000 to eight seconds in 2016. The same trends in attention span are noticeable when it comes to using technology as well. According to the studies by the University of California, Irvine psychologist Dr. Gloria Mark, the average attention span on any screen in 2004 was about two minutes and 30 seconds. In 2012, it lowered to 75 seconds on average, and in 2018, it was 47 seconds on average.

Shorter attention spans have become

more widespread as society transitions to absorbing quick, bite-sized information and engaging in constant digital interaction that particularly impacts the teenage brain.

"Essentially, they've been overwhelmed with tons of content, besieging their brains from all directions from a young age, and hence developed a habit of quickly deciding whether something is worth their time. Teenagers tend to filter out irrelevant content rapidly, in a few seconds, which can come across as a shorter attention span, in part because they sometimes get confused as to what is actually valuable and what is not," Assistant Professor of Marketing at California State University, East Bay Dr. Ivan Fedorenko said.

As society grapples with decreased attention spans, teachers have recognized the impact it has on high school student behavior in the classroom.

"As soon as -a teacher gives a second [for] a break, laptops come out flipped open and people are either playing games or watching movies or doing other homework. I've noticed it becoming increasingly difficult for students to sit still and pay attention for a long time," Human and Social Development and social sciences teacher Brian Smith said.

Teachers observe a lack of engagement and motivation to engage in thoughtful learning during class time. Specifically during block periods, some students have difficulty staying focused.

According to an anonymous Blueprint survey that 107 students participated in, 66.3 percent of students reported that they notice their attention shifting in class frequently.

"I notice decreasing attention spans

most when students need to read. Specifically, if they need to read more than one page, a lot of them have trouble, whether they engage in behavioral disruption [by] talking to a friend or have the desire to open up the computer. It seems like students don't really have the stamina to do extended reading [because] it's the least kind of stimulating environment," social sciences teacher Adam Garcia said.

As a result of technology, constant content consumption can make it challenging for students to refocus when they return to class. According to the same anonymous survey, 55.1 percent of students attribute the change in attention spans in high school students to social media.


"I read something that every time you're on your phone ... it takes your brain 20 minutes to kind of calm down and be able to focus, so I do think that's why at the beginning of class, people are so squirrely because, during passing, they've been on their phones," English teacher Erin Barth said.

Technology and the shift towards faster, more engaging media, are considered to be one of the leading contributors to the decline of teenage attention spans.

"Since smartphones, social media has created a perfect storm on a paradigm shift in students' attention spans and what's pulling their attention," Smith said.

Short-form media apps such as TikTok capitalize on and contribute to short attention spans by creating structured and short content, tailored to the teenage preference, which encourages them to continue scrolling.

"If any social media company shows to their users what they like or what really aggravates them, they will stick to the platform more because it helps users go down these rabbit holes. They are like positive and negative rabbit holes. They



is super important. If you are using AI, if you're automating that," Garcia said.

Teenage students' attention spans are also impacted due to their dependency on AI and similar software, especially considering their developing brains.

"Students whose brains haven't developed yet fully don't necessarily understand the possible damages of the hardware.

They're not training their brains to do things on their own. When they're using [AI] to either write stuff for them or to come up with their ideas and not actually practicing [critical] thinking," Smith said.

For teachers who are adapting to decreased engagement, the implementation of AI in the daily lives of students also creates potential challenges when giving assignments.

"[AI] makes me reluctant to assign certain things as either certain things in a certain format or certain things as homework, because I want students to engage in the process of thinking," Garcia said.

In addition to technology usage, post-pandemic behavior changed as students transitioned back to in-person school from online learning. Some teachers noticed a struggle to move back to traditional learning after students returned in person.

"With COVID and screens and online learning, it has distracted us. Being on screens all day, we're looking for immediate information, so then when we sit down to read a novel or read a textbook, we are just kind of skimming ... and with all the studies with online reading and screen time, it shows that it's detrimental to attention span," Barth said.

This shift from students attending school digitally to in the classroom stretched beyond attention spans and affected some students' motivation to come to school.

"Kids were so used to staying home and there was a lot of school avoidance, so a lot of kids didn't want to come to school. They were used to being home and learning virtually," Health Clerk and Attendance Tech Tina Gullberg said.

According to national and state data on absenteeism rates, absenteeism rates spiked on both a nationwide scale and a districtwide scale from 2019 to 2023, shortly after students returned to the

classroom after the pandemic. Nationally absenteeism went from 16 percent in 2019 to 26 percent in 2023. Similarly, California went from 15 percent to 25 percent from 2019 to 2023.

Some students also feel that skipping school has been normalized. There are many reasons that a student might do this, including to get more sleep or to spend more time studying.

"I do know a lot of people who skip the first period of the day to sleep in or study for a different class if they have a test later that day. I do think that coming to school

"Any social media app has been known to have adverse effects on mental health. It doesn't necessarily mean you have to be a teenager, you can even be an adult. For me, the effect I see is that my attention span personally decreases, and I personally don't feel like doing anything productive," TikTok Data Engineer Adnan Shahpurwala said.

late has been normalized. I think not coming to class has been like almost something that's not as big of a deal anymore since we came back from online school," junior Oliver Stoneman said.

Some teachers observe a change in student culture as a result of students viewing class attendance as optional. This is largely because they have access to the material online.

"I think some students don't really think that they need to be in class, and they

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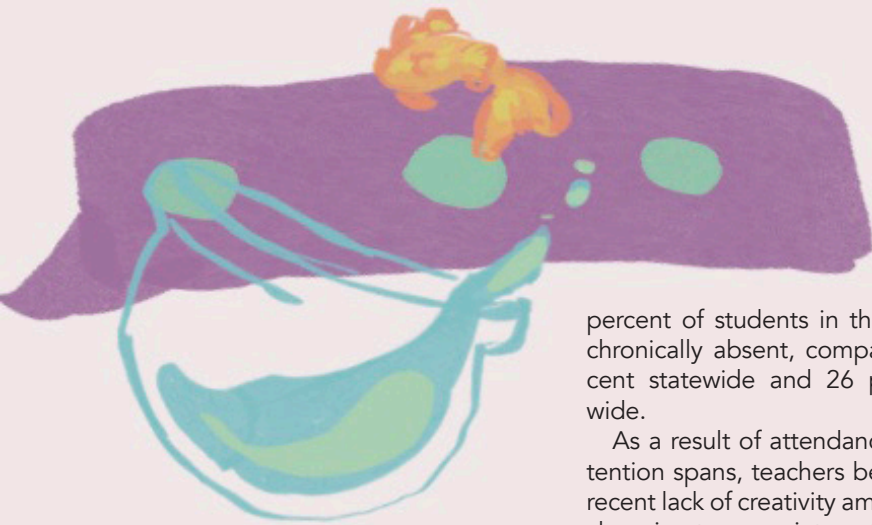
know exactly what you like, what gets you, and what will make you do that one more scroll," TikTok Data Engineer Adnan Shahpurwala said.

However, this technological impact on attention spans applies universally to all age groups and is not specific to only the youth brain.

"Any social media app has been known to have adverse effects on mental health. It doesn't necessarily mean you have to be a teenager, you can even be an adult. For me, the effect I see is that my attention span personally decreases, and I personally don't feel like doing anything productive," Shahpurwala said.

Social media and entertainment platforms are not the only contributors to the decline of teenage attention spans. In the classroom, with the introduction of new applications like Artificial Intelligence (AI), students are able to complete their assignments quicker and with less engagement.

"The amount of students that are just using AI like ChatGPT for task completion [are] skipping the thinking part. There is obviously a good use for it, if it's making work more efficient or helping you brainstorm, but the process of actually thinking through and working through problems



just get notes from their friends, they can just get homework from their friends, and I feel that a lot of students don't really see that being in class actually helps them learn new expressions," Barth said.

To combat lower attendance, teachers have changed lesson plans to address limited attention spans while encouraging student attendance in classes.

"I stopped uploading all of my slides on Canvas because I think that this kind of just almost enabled [students] to not come to class because then any lecture that I was giving, if I had my lecture online, they would just access it that way. They're missing all that essential information [and] they haven't actually engaged in being critical thinkers and the skills that I'm teaching," Barth said.

Acalanes school policy, which gives 18-year-old students the option to sign themselves out of classes or excuse their own absences, may contribute to an increase in students who skip class. Until a couple of years ago, students would need a guardian's signature to get permission to do so. Recently, a student moved to revise this policy, making the ability for adult aged students to sign out easier.

"An 18-year-old went to the board meeting a couple years ago, and said that 'we shouldn't have to have parents sign this, we are 18, we're adults. We don't need our parents to sign this letter anymore,'" Gullberg said. "It's a little easier [to leave but] some parents are against [students leaving campus]. They don't want their students to be able to have access to be able to excuse their own absences."

Although lower patterns of engagement are observed by Acalanes students, rates of chronic absenteeism are lower in the District than they are state and nationwide. Chronic absenteeism is defined as a pupil who is absent for 10 percent or more

of school days, for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences.

In 2023, 9.5

percent of students in the AUHSD were chronically absent, compared to 25 percent statewide and 26 percent nationwide.

As a result of attendance rates and attention spans, teachers believe there is a recent lack of creativity amongst students, changing teenage interactions.

"There's a little bit less natural curiosity, [the] exploring that comes as a natural result of boredom. [With technology] you have this passive form of entertainment, where it tells you what to be interested in. You're just receiving [information that] you can pick from," Garcia said.

"I stopped uploading all of my slides on Canvas because I think that this kind of just almost enabled [students] to not come to class because then any lecture that I was giving ... They're missing all that essential information [and] they haven't actually engaged in being critical thinkers and the skills that I'm teaching," English teacher Erin Barth said.

According to expert opinion, social media has also partially contributed to a feeling of dependency on social media apps, contributing to future engagement problems.

"You don't need research to tell you that social media is bad for you at any age. But [using social media] has become so core to how we interact with each other that it's difficult to get rid of it. You are on it, your friends are on it, your family is on it. A lot of other stuff is on it," Shahpurwala said.

In the classroom, one effect of increased technology, coupled with a decreasing attention span, is the potential for student stress.

"I think if I'm looking at stress levels and I'm looking at joy and I'm looking at happiness and things like that, I think trying to get that information as quickly as you can, it's going to make your stress levels higher. It's going to make things worse," Advanced Placement Psychology teacher Nader Jazayeri said.

This student stress expands beyond in-class time and subsequently can affect students' academic motivation and willingness to come to school.

"A lot of people in high school are coming to school already very drained and tired because the workload and rigor of the classes in high school is a lot more than middle school. So every year [stress levels] kind of increases. With all of our extracurricular activities and stuff, everybody's ... doing so much already out of school, and then having to go home and stay up super late, and then coming to school, it's very draining. So once you're dealing with all that and then coming to school and trying to stay really focused, have really good attention in your classes, it can be a lot harder, especially as the years go on," senior Sienna Moise said.

One way for students to decrease stress levels and refine their attention spans is to get more sleep. Sleep is vital to all aspects of life, especially with supporting cognitive functions.

"Sleep will affect everything you're doing. If you're not getting the right amount of sleep, you have sleep debt. So if you should be getting eight hours of sleep, but you're getting six hours of sleep a night, you're getting sleep debt, which is going to affect your energy levels. It's going to affect your ability to pay attention. Sleep is like the magic pill. You'll be happier. You'll be smarter. Sleep is like the magic thing when it comes to the brain," Jazayeri said.

Along with getting more sleep, students can be more intentional about how they spend their time and more aware of what they focus on and what they choose to focus on during the day.

"Think about your sleep hygiene and getting the appropriate amount of sleep. I would say do things like mindfulness, meditation practices. I would say this would never happen, but put your phone away. Try to get away from technology for at least a period of time. Give yourself an hour without using it or something like that. Try to be intentional with your time. Try to be intentional with your attention," Jazayeri said.

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ARTS



Orchestrating a Great Night

Lafayette Orchestra students play at
annual district music festival

Zinnia Khan, Hannah Geraghty, and Sophie Gold |
DEIB Director and Business Managers
Photo by Zinnia Khan

An audience fills the bleachers as students of all ages tune their instruments and warm up, preparing for their performance. A hush spreads across the crowd of parents, siblings, teachers, and peers as students pick up their bows.

Orchestra students across Lafayette played together for the District Music Festival at Stanley Middle School on Jan. 29.

The District Music Festival's are an annual series of concerts in which orchestra, choir, and band students from Acalanes High School, Stanley Middle School, and Lafayette's four elementary schools play together. The event has a long legacy in the community.

"This is a long-standing Lafayette tradition that's older than me. It's an opportunity for all string players across Lafayette to get to play for one another," Stanley Strings teacher Eric Price said.

To prepare for the concert, Acalanes Orchestra students practiced during their third period class, playing their pieces until they felt confident about the final product.

"A lot of preparation is honestly about being on the same page with the rest of my section ... I feel a lot more confident when I know exactly what position my hand has to be in for each measure. In addition to that, finding areas I struggle with and going through them slowly so I feel confident is very helpful," cellist and senior Ash Lee said.

The Acalanes Orchestra was grateful for the festival, as it provided an opportunity to rehearse for an upcoming performance at the Homestead Orchestra Festival.

"With a lot of concerts, you only really get one chance and so you kind of just throw it all out there. By having this

opportunity ahead of time, it kind of gives you a chance to get out some of the bugs, and some of the nerves that might come with you," Instrumental Music teacher Rio Nickerson said.

On the other side of town, the students of the Stanley Strings Intermezzo and Stanley Strings Orchestra, both groups from the middle school that played at the concert, prepared for the concert through hard work both inside and outside the classroom.

"Students work out most of the problems with their music at home when they practice, or during Academy or lunch. We use rehearsals during class to put all the parts together and get everyone on the same page, musically speaking," Price said.

Although at separate schools, the students of Lafayette's elementary schools - Burton Valley, Happy Valley, Lafayette, and Springhill - learned songs to play together at the concert, though the event was the first time they played together. To start off the concert, the elementary students wowed the audience with a rendition of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," played in a round.

Stanley students had the unique opportunity to suggest music for the concert. The Stanley Strings Intermezzo played familiar pieces - "Habanera" and a variation of the "Can-Can" from the operas *Carmen* and *Orpheus in the Underworld* respectively. While the Stanley Orchestra played works that were potentially lesser known - Saint-Saens' "Poco Adagio," Handel's "Entrance of the Queen of Sheba," and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's "Danse."

"I typically select most of the music for the first part of the year, but like to encourage my students to do research, both in our music library and using our online music resources, to identify music for performance consideration," Price said.

Among Acalanes' set was Handel's "Passacaglia," Doug Spata's "Colorado River Adventure," and Pietro Mascagni's "Intermezzo Sinfonico" from *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

The concert wrapped up with a performance of the "Sol-Do Concerto," in which students from all of the schools played together.

Continued on 31

"My favorite song that we're playing

ARTIST OF THE ISSUE

An insight into the aspiring musical star Noelle Dobies

Melina Galacatos, Audrey Parkin, and Gwyneth Lee | Online Editors
and Staff Writer

Photo by Eric Morford



Singing is known as an intensely emotional and often striking art form, valued for its accessibility and versatility across various settings to tell a story. Musicals help bring these stories to life by combining singing with acting and dancing. For as long as she can remember, Frosh Noelle Dobies has embraced this art to showcase her skills and passion in choral and theatrical performance.

Dobies is immersed in the performing arts and shows an immense passion for all that she does.

So far, Dobies has involved herself in multiple choral programs, including harmonics, octet, and drama, participated in the fall play, and will be in the upcoming 2025 spring musical *SpongeBob Squarepants*.

"[Dobies] doesn't let being a first-year student stop her from trying new things—auditioning for the fall play, singing in acapella groups, etc.," Acalanes Choir teacher Meredith Hawkins said.

In preparation for the spring musical, Dobies has already demonstrated her talent and enthusiasm through her role as one of the Sardine Devotees as well as an ensemble member.

"In addition to being a wonderful ensemble member, Noelle's performance skills are top-notch. She has a beautiful singing voice

and is highly expressive on stage. She takes direction well and stays present in the moment in character, even when she is not the focus of the scene," Acalanes Spring Musical Director Andie Patterson said.

While she enjoys participating in many forms of theatrical production, musicals stand out to Dobies as an especially effective way to express herself.

"Musicals are definitely a lot more free. You can do a lot more with your voice, especially if a character speaks differently, [and] you can sing differently. Whereas choral singing, you have to follow the notes or it sounds really off," Dobies said.

Despite being new to Acalanes performing arts programs, Dobies has extensive experience with performing from an early introduction to musical theater.

"I was [in] *Little Red Riding Hood* at my preschool. [In] the next [production], *Peter Pan*, I was Wendy," Dobies said.

Each show she participated in fueled a growing excitement and passion for choral performance.

"I love singing because it's so much more expressive than talking, and I love to express [myself]," Dobies said.

Dobies' love for musicals and performing was inspired by those around her who encouraged her.

"I think [my dad] and my grandma are really big on singing and my grandma is really big on musicals and watching them, so she introduced them to me, and then [my dad] helped me start," Dobies said. "Everyone that I've done a show with, anyone that's directed me, I find such inspiration from them."

In preparation for a performance, Dobies practices by committing her time to running through and listening to her parts until she's confident with them.

"For a concert like in choir, definitely listening to part tracks and the music a bunch of times helps. It's kind of muscle memory for musicals, just doing it over and over again and playing the soundtracks, and going over the songs," Dobies said.

In addition, Dobies explores ways to pursue independent singing. She is starting by participating in Lafayette Partners in Education (LPIE) events and competitions.

"I'm doing Project LPIE which I've never done anything like it before. Hopefully that goes well. I do want to gain more confidence in singing solo, and that's kind of the first step," Dobies said.

Dobies hopes to pursue a career in singing and the performing arts.

"[It is] my biggest dream, if I could be anything in the world. But if that is not able to happen, I would want to be a teacher or a director," Dobies said.

The foundation of a career in the arts is exposure, experience, and training, and Dobies has been putting in the work. In December 2024, Dobies' hard work paid off when Acalanes Choir named her their singer of the month. Many of her peers and mentors saw her dedication to practice and improve, despite being sick.

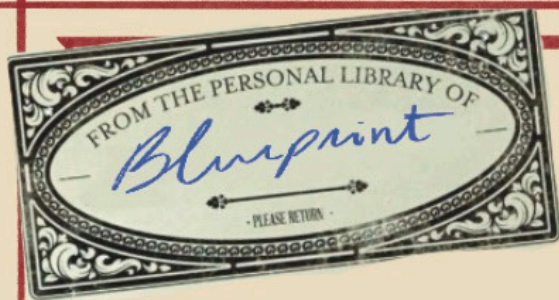
"Noelle is such a sweet person, and the fact that she powered through an entire concert while being sick was honestly impressive. She works so hard and I couldn't think of anyone else better to nominate for December than her," Hawkins said.

In addition to peer support, Dobies is considered a valuable member of the performing arts programs by directors.

"I just met Noelle this year, but I am struck by her enthusiasm, flexibility, and positive attitude. She is the kind of performer that a director always hopes for. She volunteers for extra responsibilities and advocates for herself," Patterson said.

Teachers and peers alike have high hopes for Dobies' future in the performing arts.

"She is always on key, and I can tell she has a bright future... I am so proud of her accomplishments in her acting and can't wait to see what her future holds," frosh Indiana Perry said.



BOOK NOOK

Reviewing Historical Fiction Novels
Spread by Bo Chevaleau

The Book of Lost Names by Kristin Harmel

Emily Roberts | Print Feature Editor

"We are only responsible for the things we do—or fail to do—ourselves."

Kristin Harmel's *The Book of Lost Names* is a poignant and gripping historical fiction novel exploring resilience, love, and sacrifice against the harsh backdrop of World War II. As the story opens, Eva Traube Adams, a Florida librarian nearing retirement, stumbles across a magazine photo of a book with a secret code stolen by the Nazis in the war's final days. The sight of it unearths memories Eva has long buried, transporting her back to 1942 in Nazi-occupied France. After fleeing Paris with her mother following her father's arrest, Eva joins the local resistance in a mountain town located within the free zone, working with Rémy, a young forger, to help Jewish children escape to Switzerland with false identities.

To preserve their real names, Eva and Rémy encode them in an old religious text, *The Book of Lost Names*. The book becomes even more vital when the resistance is betrayed and Rémy vanishes. In the present, Eva must decide if she is ready to revisit a past she has tried so hard to leave behind to reunite with the people she helped way back when.

Harmel weaves the story in perfect harmony, underscoring strength and resilience in the face of evil. World War II novels frequently feel overdone, but Eva's story highlights new roles and perspectives from this testing period, making it perfect for all readers.

The War that Saved My Life by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley

Grace Wolpert | Arts Copy Editor

"It had been awful, but I hadn't quit. I had persisted. In battle I had won."

The War That Saved My Life by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley follows ten-year-old Ada's harrowing journey during World War II. Living in a small London flat with her younger brother Jamie, she endures abuse from their single mother who keeps her locked inside due to her clubfoot. Ada's untreated disability makes walking difficult, but she longs for freedom.

When the children are evacuated to the countryside to escape the war, Ada seizes the chance to flee with Jamie. They arrive in Kent where they are placed with Susan Smith, a cold woman who initially resents them. Despite her reservations, Susan becomes a supportive figure, allowing the children to thrive. Ada learns to sew, read, write, and ride horses. Susan also provides crutches and considers surgery to correct Ada's foot.

Though their new life is hopeful, the fear of their mother reclaiming them looms. What follows is a mix of distress, sadness, and resolution, always keeping the reader engaged. Bradley's vivid imagery captures the wartime tension, while complex character development fosters deep connections. The novel explores domestic violence and disability awareness, making it a heartbreaking yet powerful read. Ultimately, the novel reminds readers to appreciate the freedoms they have.

The Women by Kristin Hannah

Sydney Scovic | Staff Writer

"The problem with war is that it changes everything. It changes who you are, who you'll become, and the way you see the world."

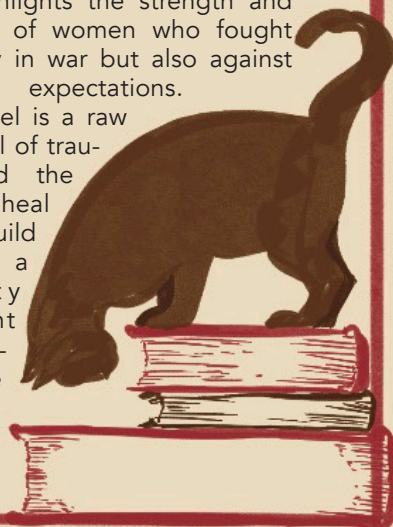
Kristin Hannah's novel *The Women* is a touching historical fiction novel set during the Vietnam War. The story follows the journey of Fran "Frankie" McGrath, a young woman raised by her conservative parents on Coronado Island.

Frankie's life takes an unexpected turn when she enlists as an army nurse in the war after her brother ships out to serve in Vietnam. With limited experience, she becomes overwhelmed by the chaos and destruction of the war. Despite suddenly being thrown into one of the most gruesome settings, she continues on to another tour.

Although Frankie returns home, leaving the battlefield behind, she does not escape the chaos and destruction the war has inflicted on America's social and political state. Frankie must navigate how the Vietnam War has complicated her life.

Through vivid depictions of life on the battlefield and the harsh realities of returning home, Hannah highlights the strength and courage of women who fought not only in war but also against societal expectations.

The novel is a raw portrayal of trauma and the fight to heal and rebuild amid a society reluctant to recognize her sacrifices.





Mode: Printed Perfection

How Students Are Rocking Leopard, Camo, and More This Season

Aya O'Neal, Cara Hamilton, and Olivia Silverstein
| Online Content Manager and Staff Writers
Spread by Cara Hamilton and Olivia Silverstein

Contributions by Sela Sarbiewski and Samantha Smith | Staff Writers

Prints are back and bigger than ever. From animal patterns to classic stripes, students embrace prints that blend 2000s nostalgia with a modern flair. Whether it's a bold statement or a subtle accent, these patterns can be spotted almost everywhere on campus.

Camo, once a purposeful piece for hunters and soldiers, has become a significant part of today's fashion scene, filling Acalanes hallways and designer couture shelves. Invented during World War II, troops used camouflage patterns for concealment. The print reached commercial stores in 1971 after *Vogue* re-released an issue from 1943 detailing camo's history and featured models in camo clothing. In the 80's, the modern Marine Pattern (MARPAT) digital camo military uniform took center stage, a print hunters later adopted. Today, camo has made a resurgence that no one saw coming, granted that is the point of camo, with luxury and streetwear designers alike incorporating Duck Camo, Woodland Camo, and Realtree into their 2024 collections.

Stripes, initially originating as a symbol of rebellion and revolution, have made their way into Acalanes' hallways as a staple of the "Euro Chic" trend. Stripes date all the way back to the 12th century, when jesters and monks pioneered the pattern. In the 1800s stripes made appearances on prison uniforms and were meant to symbolize the bars in jail cells. The print was reinvented after Coco Chanel's 1917 Nautical Collection reintroduced "sailor stripes" as a trendy fashion staple. Today, brands like Brandy Melville have reintroduced the pattern as a staple in the teen wardrobe.

Leopard and cheetah print are prowling their way back into style. These patterns originated from animal pelts, worn by Greek emperors and Egyptian pharaohs as symbols of power and prestige. Historical artists have painted Egyptian and Greek gods draped in leopard and cheetah print, reinforcing their status as timeless emblems of luxury. Though often confused, leopard spots are rosette shaped with a lighter center, while cheetah spots are solid and evenly spaced. After a spike in popularity in the 2000s, these prints clawed their way into wardrobes today. From statement coats to sleek accessories, leopard and cheetah patterns are here to stay.

Zebra print first began to rise in popularity in the U.S. in the 1920s after famous actresses like Joan Crawford popularized the print. Later on, in the 1980s-2000s, rockstars, and teen celebs brought it back to the fashion forefront. Although the fashion world had a brief falling out with zebra, some going as far to classify it and other animal prints as tacky, it has resurfaced once again thanks to new Y2K-inspired styles. Zebra print is seen as slightly more distinctive and unique compared to its cheetah or leopard counterparts, thanks to being just a bit less mainstream. Most people today, including many students at Acalanes, don't don complete zebra outfits but rather use the print as an accent pattern to elevate and add interest to an outfit.



RECIPE OF THE ISSUE

Apple Crisp

Helena McGinley, Melina Galacatos, and Audrey Parkin | News Copy Editor
and Online Editors



With comforting, classic spices and fresh fruit, apple crisp is a wonderful way to celebrate the transition from winter to spring. The sweet topping provides a delicate contrast to the tang of the fresh apple. The recipe can be easily doubled or cut in half to accommodate different events or pan sizes. While this dessert is a delightful stand-alone, the crisp also pairs well with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or a hot latte.

Ingredients:

Apple mixture

8 large apples
2 tsp lemon juice
2 tbsp sugar

Spice mixture

2 tsp cinnamon
1 cup sugar
½ tsp salt

Topping

1 cup flour
1 cup oats
1 cup cold butter

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees, and butter a 9x13 baking dish.
2. Slice the apples, and combine them in a bowl with lemon juice and sugar. Let sit while preparing the topping.
3. Make the spice mixture: in a small

bowl, combine sugar, cinnamon, and salt.

4. Combine the flour and oats in another bowl.

5. Dice cold butter, then combine by hand with flour and oat mixture.

6. Stir the spice mixture with the sliced apples.

7. Pour apple mixture into the dish

8. Cover with the topping, and bake for 45 to 50 minutes or until the top is golden brown and slightly bubbling.



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QUOTE OF THE ISSUE



"Leisure without study is death – a tomb for the living person" - Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Moral Letters, 82.3

Jack Gebhardt | Head Copy Editor

Graphic by Sof Cerruti

We all need breaks. A day to rest, recharge, and let go of the demands or stresses of work, school, and life as a whole. Sometimes it's a day off; sometimes it's a week or a month off. But when these days turn into mindless scrolling, sitting in a dark room, and overall constant laziness, time starts to slip by unnoticed. Slowly, they become times of stagnation rather than a long-awaited rest day.

While these days of complete laziness have their place in our lives, because let's be honest, everyone needs one now and then, it's not a healthy state, mentally or physically. The Ancient Stoic Seneca's words challenge us to question what types of rest nurture us - rather than burying ourselves alive in idleness.

I don't claim to have life figured out, but I have noticed that my leisure days are best spent when I do something that refills my urge to live. And these

days are not the ones consumed with laziness, but the ones filled with purpose and meaning. Going on a walk, watching the sunset, playing golf, or driving with the windows down with music playing: through these small actions, I quickly begin to feel alive again.

Yet, the most meaningful activities on a leisure day are those that help you reflect on life. When we remind ourselves of all we have to be grateful for, we in turn become grateful for the opportunity to be alive. Find ways to consistently remind yourself of this feeling, something like refreshing your phone's home screen with a different photo each day or even just spending more time with the people you love. Whatever you do, be cognizant of the things that refill your urge to live.

Seneca's idea of "study" doesn't have to mean cracking open a textbook and forcing yourself into pro-

ductivity. It can look like the activities I mentioned or anything that gets you engaged and filled with a sense of accomplishment and curiosity.

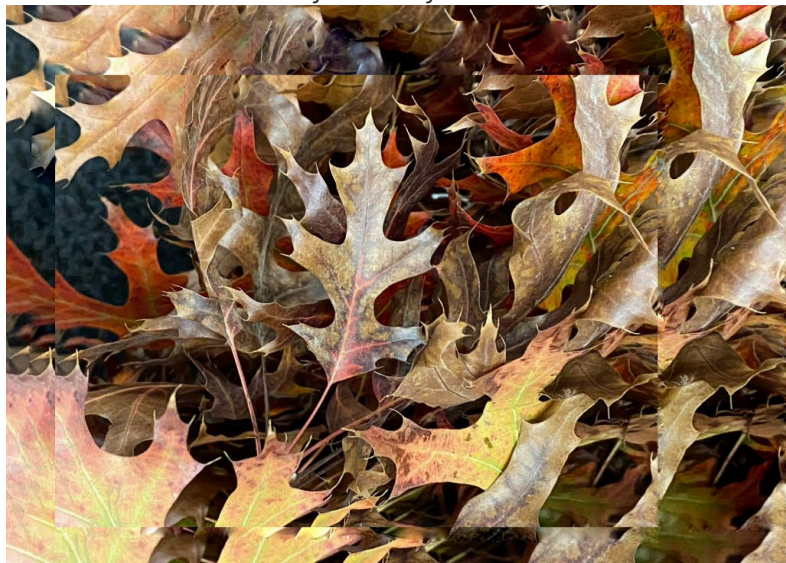
It is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking leisure is something we'll earn "someday." Ryan Holiday, a well-known author, points out how some people work their entire lives to save up for retirement, just to sit in front of a TV waiting for the days to pass by. That's not living; that's just existing.

You don't have to be a philosopher to think about this type of stuff; you just need enough spirit to make an effort to learn how to live well. Think about how you can spend your time to feel connected to the world, whether it's hiking Mount Everest or baking cookies for a neighbor. The real point of leisure isn't merely avoiding reality - it's about rediscovering the vibrant pulse of being alive.

Community, Coffee, and Culture

*Lamorinda Arts Alliance hosts a gallery at Papillon
Quality Gourmet Coffee and Tea*

Cameron Powell, Jenna Kessler, and Hanna Wiśniewska | Online Editor-
in-Chief, Business Manager, and Social Media Manager
Courtesy Photo by Anne Rabe



The sweet aromas of coffee, tea, boba, and baked goods complement the beautiful art that adorns the walls of the cafe. Acrylic, oil, and watercolor paintings, photographs, and more encompassing the theme of winter add to the ambiance.

From Nov. 14 to Jan. 14, the Lamorinda Arts Alliance (LAA) hosted a winter-themed art gallery at Papillon Quality Gourmet Coffee and Tea in Lafayette for customers and community members to view and purchase.

The goal of the art gallery is to share the work of local artists with the Lafayette community. The cafe has organized similar galleries four times a year for the past two years.

"We decided to host the art gallery because we wanted to provide local artists the opportunity to exhibit their art pieces through four annual art shows, and this is also done at no extra cost," Papillon employee and senior Unubat Munkhsuld said. "Papillon started organizing the art gallery approximately two years ago, and as long as there's local artists around here, we'll likely continue doing so."

Artists found inspiration to create these gallery pieces from a variety of sources ranging from their daily tasks to

fascinating natural phenomena.

"It took a while to learn how to paint the waves of the ocean. I had to study them and watch them to understand how they work and their shapes and forms as they crash onto the beach. Painting them is just as restful and meditative as sitting and watching them. We are so lucky to live near the sea," artist Samantha McNally said.

Some artists selected past artwork they had completed which went along with the gallery's winter theme to submit.

"This particular image displayed at Papillon was taken at Diablo Foods in the floral department. I photographed a bouquet of fall leaves, then edited the image to bring out the textures and movement in the natural leaves through layering of images. It was actually created several years ago but fit the [seasonal] theme," mobile photographer Anne Rabe said.

With the recent closings of locations in Lafayette once displaying locally crafted artwork, community members note the importance of current galleries, like Papillon's, supporting local artist communities.

"It is wonderful that Papillon is supporting local art by providing space to

local artists' work. Lamorinda and in particular, Lafayette, has lost many of the venues that used to showcase art," Rabe said. "The closing of the Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery and very recently Hollie's Homegrown store which also featured rotating shows of art and artisans' work were big losses to the art community."

Additionally, the gallery's cafe location makes accessing and viewing art easier for community members.

"I think having an art gallery in a cafe is a great idea because it brings art to people who might not make the trip to a gallery to see local artist's work. We all appreciate the Papillon's owner's generous support in giving us walls to show our art. It helps LAA, and it helps our local artists," McNally said.

The artwork features many local landmarks such as the Lafayette Reservoir and Mount Diablo.

"The artwork is beautiful and impressive. One of my favorite [pieces] is the painting of the Lafayette Reservoir Tower. I love going to the Reservoir myself, and I like that I can recognize the painting immediately. It's a homey piece," Papillon employee and senior at Campolindo High School Sarah Chen said.

With art galleries around the community discontinuing, artists hope that similar initiatives in new locations can surface going forward.

"I am hopeful that more local venues will open up for art displays in the near future, including non-traditional 'gallery' spaces such as Papillon," Rabe said.

This gallery provides an opportunity for the cafe to engage with the community, giving local artists exposure and allowing customers to discover new art.

"We believe this art gallery presents us the opportunity to stay active within our community and also give most people, especially our customers, new things to discover," Munkhsuld said.

The gallery helps support local artists while adding to the atmosphere of Papillon Gourmet Coffee and Tea.

"The art gallery features a variety of local artists which is special and adds charm to Lafayette. Featuring them there helps the artists get represented and acknowledged for their artwork... Our customers admire the artwork gallery and the artists themselves. They like that the artists are local and members of our community," Chen said.

Ruebner's

A Review of Mac Miller's *Balloonierisms*

Cole Ruebner | Contributing Writer

Spread by Justin Rosenblatt

When it comes to the music industry, my least favorite two-word phrase to hear is "posthumous album." The word "posthumous" refers to the fact that the album has been or will be released after the artist dies. This could be due to the artist's family or record label finishing what the musician started, at best applying finishing touches to a distinct vision and at worst putting together breadcrumbs of ideas that were never meant to see the light of day. These albums are often released for one of two reasons. For one, those close to the artist might see fit to release a heartfelt tribute, bringing their loved one's voice to the fans one last time. A good example of this is Notorious B.I.G.'s classic "Life After Death," released just twenty days after the east-coast rapper's untimely passing. The second motive may be to profit off of the increased attention towards the artist after their death, which often means pushing out half-baked vocal demos that the artist never intended to release. Some examples of this include Michael Jackson's *Michael*, Amy Winehouse's *Lioness: Hidden Treasures*, Juice Wrld's *Legends Never Die*, *Fighting Demons*, or *The Party Never Ends*. With so many disappointing posthumous albums that only serve to tarnish the legacy of the artist that they are supposed to pay tribute to, I was more than skeptical of the release of *Balloonierisms*, the second Miller album released after his untimely passing due to an accidental overdose. As it turns out, however, this album not only pays a truly heartfelt tribute to the legendary rapper, but it also manages to shine a new light on his artistic potential, showcasing a mature, vulnerable side of the once deeply misunderstood musician.

The conception of *Balloonierisms* began in 2014, partly explaining why the album sounded as fleshed out as it did. According to Rostrum Records, the label chose to shelve the demo due to it sounding too "out there" or experimental. When I first heard this opinion, I was confused as to what it could mean, but now that I have finally had a chance to listen to the album in its entirety, I understand but completely disagree with the label's decision.

Make no mistake, this album is experi-

mental. The instrumentation can range from freeform jazz, as seen on the lead single "5 Dollar Pony Rides," to crushing psychedelic odysseys, such as on the mind-bending "DJ's Chord Organ." The production of this album may not appeal to everybody, but it is, at the very least, daring and most definitely original. I adore the risks that this project took, as each song innovates musically in its own way. It is also important to note that many of the production credits on these songs are attributed to Miller himself, or his alter ego Larry Fisherman, which again shows how much of a talented and creative mind was lost.

While oftentimes touching and melancholy, this album does not sacrifice Miller's knack for surprisingly dark humor and crackpot wisdom. If anything, *Balloonierisms* is Miller's darkest project to date. For example, "Do You Have A Destination" highlights Miller's insecurity and vulnerability over shimmering synthesizers and ghostly backing vocals. He delivers lines that are equal parts chilling and clever, like "I went to sleep faded / Then I woke up invisible," or the now haunting "Trying to find heaven, I get high but never come close." This song, and many others on the album, serve as insight into the psyche of Miller, as even when he seemed to have been riding high, he had always been struggling in some capacity.

Not all of the album is this crushing, however. Moments of light shine through, such as on the aforementioned "5 Dollar Pony Rides." The instrumentation is dense, with bouncy bass, contributed by the one and only Thundercat, on top of bright keyboard flourishes. The soft percussion adds a sense of rhythm to an otherwise uncontrollable jazz melody. In my opinion, Miller's singing on this song is not necessarily his best, but the bright emotion and bouncy feel of the

track make up for that. It is a pure distillation of Miller's more light-hearted side, and its rough-around-the-edges nature only strengthens that feeling.

So, as so many posthumous albums are doomed to fail, how come this one rose above the rest? Right off the bat, it is clear that this project is not at all aiming to be anything but a tribute to an incredible artist. It is weird and "out there," and it is better for that. Oftentimes when an artist passes, their original vision is sacrificed for the sake of radio play to capitalize on new fans, watering down a sound to expose it to the masses, but in the case of *Balloonierisms*, it is simply Miller personified. In addition, much of Miller's original vision remained intact in the final product. This project had a blueprint available from back in 2014, and as the estate's main concern was honoring the rapper's legacy, they built a beautiful structure out of the foundation that was left behind. Finally, this project was backed by some extremely talented people who Miller was already close with before his passing. It is touching to see features from SZA and Thundercat, as both artists had a well-documented history with Miller, and were able to take his vision to the next level. In short, this album excelled because it knew exactly what it wanted to be: a truly passionate reminder of the brilliant mind that we lost, and a gentle pat on the shoulder reassuring us that Miller's legacy will live on forever.



Super Bowl Snack Power Rankings

Rating foods to eat during the big game

Noah Frankel and Trevor Krick | Staff Writers

Photos by Noah Frankel and Trevor Krick

According to the National Football League (NFL) Football Operations, last year's Super Bowl LVIII had an average of 123.4 million viewers, a record high for any live U.S. broadcast. As viewership numbers climb higher this year, so will the number of fans searching for a complete spread of tasty munchies to entertain themselves during the big game on Feb. 9.

Chicken Wings: 🍗🍗🍗🍗🍗

When thinking about Super Bowl munchies, most minds go straight to chicken wings. Whether bone-in, boneless, buffalo, lemon pepper, or any other wing imaginable, they are a staple in the Super Bowl rotation. This is partly due to their finger-food qualities, making wings easy to eat without hassle. Unfortunately, their messiness can make them a liability for keeping their surroundings clean. Between the two *Blueprint* review team favorites, buffalo and mango habañero, mango habañero proved to be better with its higher spice level and sweeter flavor. Additionally, the reviewers suggest boneless chicken wings to limit mess and cleanup, as forks can be used and no bones need to be discarded.

Kebabs: 🍖🍖🍖🍖🍖

What's better than meat and veggies? Meat and veggies on a stick. Kebabs can bring an organized and yummy touch to any spread of food. Additionally, their customizable nature allows for an endless amount of combinations, including all meat, all veggies, or the *Blueprint* review team favorite, a combi-



nation of both. A good mix of beef or lamb and vegetables, such as peppers and onions, can brighten your Super Bowl eats. If you want to further level your kebab game, try adding a refreshing yogurt-based dipping sauce or a spiced hummus. The *Blueprint* reviewers tried both lamb and chicken kebabs, two of the most common kebab meats. While the chicken kebab went better with the hummus dip, the lamb's tenderness elevated the eating experience, giving it the edge over the chicken.

Chips and Dip: 🍟🍟🍟🍟🍟

At most parties, there is one bowl of chips that constantly needs refilling, along with a slowly depleting dip. Chips are an easily accessible, highly craveable snack. While lackluster by themselves, a good dip, such as guacamole, can greatly improve the flavor and eating experience of a potato or tortilla chip. To enhance the concept of chips and dip, combine them into one glorious creation: nachos. With limitless variations, nachos take away the effort of having to dip your chip time and time again. The *Blueprint* reviewers believe that nachos are the ideal way to eat chips, as one can get chips, sauce, meat, and veggies all in one bite. While chips and guac is a classic due to its crunchy and creamy fusion, nachos simply have too much tastiness and variety to pass up.

Pigs in a Blanket and Hot Dogs: 🌭🌭🌭🌭🌭

Although these pigs may not be comfy in their blanket, they sure are

tasty. Contrary to the name, these snacks are mostly made from beef, with a pastry wrapping to top them off. The crunch of pastry wrapping adds a nice touch to the pigs in a blanket, finishing an overall delicious snack. Easily served on a plate with some toppings after a quick stop in the oven or toaster, these snacks are easy to make and even easier to eat. But wait...did someone say hot diggidy dog? Hotdogs are not quite as easy to cook and eat, but including them as part of the spread is doable. In addition, the hotdog is enough food to serve for lunch, which can be great in a room full of quick snacks. To see if hotdogs deserve the spot on the table, the *Blueprint* reviewers grilled up some dogs and gave them a try. Hotdogs can be modified in many ways with toppings such as ketchup, mustard, and relish, which makes them great for all taste buds. Compared to hotdogs, pigs in a blanket are much easier to make and eat, although the greater effort of making hotdogs is



rewarding. When it comes down to it, hotdogs take the win for being the overall better food to eat at the Super Bowl.

Veggie Platter: 🥕🥕🥕

The numerous side eyes and the guilt of not taking a veggie; these experiences are usually associated with the infamous veggie platter. However, there is a beacon of hope: ranch. Although comedian Jim Gaffigan has said otherwise, good vegetables and a quality side of ranch or hummus can balance the usually unhealthy Super Bowl foods. Although the veggie platter may not be as fun as other Super Bowl foods, it provides a healthy alternative. There are choices when choosing a veggie platter, the most important being ranch or hummus and the other being the quality of the vegetables. Buying a premade platter is not nearly as good as getting fresh veggies from the market. After the *Blueprint* reviewers tried both dips with the veggies, they decided that ranch is the way to go.

District Orchestra Festival

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is the 'Sol-Do Concerto.' It's a piece that everyone in the room plays together, whether you're a 5th grader or a High School Senior," violinist and junior Mielia Hsu said. "When I was in elementary school I always looked forward to the day I could upgrade from the simpler middle school part... and play the harder high school part, so it's really cool to come full circle and be playing that part for the elementary schoolers."

Instrumental music teachers at Acalanes hope their students will gain insight from performing alongside younger community members.

"For them, it provides really good leadership opportunities, and for them to kind of reflect on kind of where they

started, and what they can do going forward," Nickerson said.

Acalanes students reflect that value, and enjoyed getting to play in a formal setting with music students at other schools.

"Playing with the middle school, we have a great opportunity to mentor kids and encourage them to pursue music in high school. For those our age, we can watch how they operate as an orchestra and learn from them. It's also just fun to play with new people," Lee said.

A major goal of the District Music Festival is to connect students of all ages through music, and illustrate the power of perseverance.

"The nickname of these concerts is

the 'stepping stones concert' because students can see what happens if they keep up their music-making as they grow up," Price said.

However, regardless of the tangible benefits of playing music in the District Festival, students appreciate the bonds they form with each other when playing in an ensemble.

"My favorite part about playing in the orchestra is the sense of community that develops. There's people of all grade levels in the orchestra, and it's allowed me to meet people I never would have otherwise," Hsu said.

OPINION



Transgender Representation in Media

Dismantling the recent wave of fear-mongering regarding transgender people

Cypress Reid | Staff Writer

Graphic by Bo Chevaleau

***Blueprint would like to disclaim that this article contains a mention of suicide.**

Amidst the stench of old socks and the flash of fluorescence stinging my eyes, the only thing I felt as the only trans girl in the school locker room was other girls' eyes on me. Despite all the news coverage of whether or not trans people should be allowed in anything from sports games to bathrooms, these debates never featured the voices of trans people themselves.

In recent years, the coverage of transgender issues has become incredibly polarized, with large groups insisting there is a growing epidemic of men pretending to be women. Political fear-mongering engineered a fake "transgender crisis" that is caus-

ing real damage to our community and the youth within it.

A popular method of attacking transgender people is through advertisements. Non-profit media organization Prager University Foundation, for example, has a dedicated playlist of 27 anti-trans videos, which they have broadcast on television and YouTube. These polished advertisements frame the issue as a scientific topic, making them appear factual and harmless while hurting transgender people. These advertisements have mirrored the efforts of politicians to use the topic as a wedge among voters. ABC News reported that "Republican groups have spent more than \$21 million on anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ television ads".

Many of these adverts frame the is-

sue as if some massive transgender human tidal wave has swept the nation, leaving nothing but rainbow glitter in its wake. This is, frankly, absurd. According to the Williams Institute, only 0.5 percent of the adult U.S. population is transgender, and the number of adults who identify as transgender has remained steady over time. Compared to artificially stoked fear of an onslaught of perverts changing their gender to cheat at women's sports, the actual number of transgender people in the world seems minuscule.

Another common talking point built on an inherently shaky foundation is the notion that transgender people have no basis in biological reality. In a recent executive order from the White House, President Trump stated that, "it is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality. Under my direction, the Executive Branch will enforce all sex-protective laws to promote this reality," essentially attempting to say that sex and gender are undisputedly tethered to one another.

The true 'biological reality' is much more fluid than many believe. In a study published by the National Library of Medicine, researchers discovered that "the underlying brain anatomy in transgender people is shifted away from their biological sex towards their gender identity," giving specific, immutable proof of the scientific validity of transgender people.

The damage done reaches beyond impersonal advertisements or the preaching of pedestal-mounted politicians. Public opinions have shifted from ambivalence to dismissal of transgender people. A study conducted by members of the Pew Research Center Kim Parker, Juliana Horowitz, and Anna Brown determined that in May of 2022, the percent of US adults that believed gender is determined at birth grew to 60 percent, displaying that Americans have become increasingly dismissive of transgender identities.

Lafayette has seen a surge in explicit transphobia in recent years. During the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board Meeting of

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Christianity's Image Crisis

How the weaponization of Christianity in politics undermines faith

Haley Chelemedos | Print Managing Editor and Print Head of Layout

Graphics by Bo Chevaleau



***Blueprint would like to disclaim that this article contains a mention of physician-assisted death.**

Christianity, a cornerstone of community and a beacon of moral clarity for many, has increasingly become a divisive force in modern politics. Scripture and doctrine are often invoked to draw sharp lines on issues including abortion access, LGBTQ+ rights, and end-of-life care. Reducing complex moral questions into binary choices based on narrow interpretations of scripture leaves little room for compromise or empathy. To address this, we must reframe our understanding of Christianity's role in shaping American political ideology, not as a rigid code,

but as an evolving and dynamic guide to ethics and morals.

The tension between religion and politics is not new. The Maryland Act of Religious Toleration of 1649 sought to mitigate religious conflict by granting religious freedom to all Christians in the colonies. Its exclusion and consequential persecution of non-Christians highlights an enduring strife, balancing Christianity's potential to unify with its tendency to exclude when paired with politics. This tension has continued to shape Christianity's role in public life.

Centuries later, the framers of the U.S. Constitution took a significant step by prohibiting religious tests to hold office, essentially separating church and state, and guaranteed freedom of re-

ligion with the First Amendment. Despite this legal foundation, religion and politics have repeatedly clashed. During John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign, for example, fierce anti-Catholic sentiment forced him to affirm his independence from church influence in political decisions.

Conversely, the rise of the Moral Majority, a political organization in the late 20th century, exemplifies how politicians have used Christianity as a political tool, framing issues in ways that divide rather than unite. Jerry Falwell, a televangelist and leader of the Moral Majority, was a Christian fundamentalist who spoke strongly against abortion, gambling, homosexuals, and the Muslim community. He made many offensive remarks against those he deemed his opponents and justified them with biblical texts.

While Christianity has long been intertwined with political power, its use as a tool for division has significantly increased in the last decade. This heightened weaponization prioritizes rigid interpretations of scripture and ideological agendas over Christianity's broader teachings of compassion, inclusion, and hope. The loudest and most divisive interpretations of Christianity dominate political conversations, diminishing Christianity's potential to inspire thoughtful dialogue and unity across political aisles.

The weaponization of religion in U.S. politics becomes particularly clear when examining religious rhetoric in political debates on social issues. For example, the framing of abortion in terms of "pro-life" versus "pro-choice" pits divine will against individual autonomy. This approach excludes nuanced perspectives, like supporting abortion access while valuing life's sanctity. By reducing complex issues to absolute moral arguments, religion's potential for helping find a compromise to political questions greatly declines.

Political rhetoric also tends to amplify exclusionary voices and marginalize those with more modern interpretations of faith. While some Christian denominations embrace same-sex marriage and other LGBTQ+ rights, others condemn it based on scripture. Rather than acknowledging diverse perspectives and opinions within religion, political discourse tends to elevate the most divisive interpretations, framing

them as representative of the whole.

End-of-life care is another area in which Christianity's role has been distorted. The debate over physician-assisted death and euthanasia often evokes interpretations that argue against any form of intervention that may shorten life. Similarly to abortion, this interpretation oversimplifies complex moral questions, reducing them to a rigid pro-life stance. While many Christians advocate for compassionate care at the end of life, especially in cases of extreme suffering, the political discourse surrounding end-of-life issues often elevates the most conservative readings of scripture. This narrow focus stifles a more nuanced conversation on how to balance faith, ethics, and personal rights.

The instrumentalization of Christianity in politics has significantly reduced its potential to address societal problems. A 2023 *Gallup* poll reported that 224 million people in the U.S. identify as Christians, 67 percent of the total population. Considering the vast Christian population, most of whom do not hold as rigid interpretations as those some politicians rely on, Christianity could serve as a unifying force to foster empathy, understanding, and cooperation across ideological divides. However,

when only the most extreme voices within Christianity are heard, its ability to inspire thoughtful solutions to complex issues is undermined.



er, when only the most extreme voices within Christianity are heard, its ability to inspire thoughtful solutions to complex issues is undermined.

America is already experiencing a profound repercussion due to the weaponization of Christianity in modern politics. A 2022 report by the Pew Research Center shows a steadily decreasing Christian population that will dip under 50 percent by 2060, if the current trends continue. As Christianity becomes more associated with political agendas, younger people who tend to prioritize inclusivity and social justice are turning away from religion.

The use of Christianity as a political tool creates a barrier for young people who are seeking a faith that aligns more with their values of equality and compassion.

Although Christianity has become closely aligned with political arguments, it is possible to restore the public perception of Christianity and help mend the societal damage its exploitation has caused. Elevating Christianity's core value of love for God and for one another, and restoring the church's role as a moral compass separate from political influence can help heal the divisions within Christianity and among people of different religions.

Encouraging nuanced, thoughtful discourse is another key way to fix the weaponization of Christianity in modern politics. Instead of binary arguments, Christians and non-Christians alike should engage in thoughtful reflection about their interpretations of moral truths and how to apply them. This practice will also help empower younger Christian voices that value justice and inclusion. These voices offer a counter-narrative to the idea that Christianity is a rigid, abstaining body. Embracing values that resonate with all Christians will help invigorate the faith and restore confidence in Christianity.

Transgender Identities in Politics

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March 6, 2024, an organized group of anti-trans protesters advocated for the banning of transgender students from sports and verbally attacked transgender students, calling detransitioners and the entire transgender community "sexually mutilated." The protestors eventually attempted to shut down the meeting in its entirety. Many community members are blinded by fear and perceived righteousness, leading them to limit the liberty they preach to protect.

Anti-trans policies also have a drastic effect on the mental health of transgender or questioning kids. In a *Nature Human Behavior* study, researchers Wilson Y. Lee and J. Nicholas Hobbs

discovered that "enacting state-level anti-transgender laws increased incidents of past-year suicide attempts among [transgender and nonbinary] young people by ... [up to] 72 percent," disproving the notion that policies of this nature do anything except kill transgender youth.

In a battle based on misinformation and fear, salvation lies in knowledge. Fear of the dark can be fought off with a nightlight, and therein lies safety from the toxic opinions sprawled across the news. Systemic change for trans people across the country starts with improving public opinion. Meeting transgender people, lobbying congress members to increase protections for trans children, or even sitting down and having a conversation with friends

or family on trans issues can help root out negative views of trans people and halt the factors that produce them.

As I find myself back in the locker room, despite the constant judgment and strange smell of the locker room, what I remember most was how inclusive and kind my friends were to me. I remember sharing the pain of the swim unit together, watching frivolous videos, and the laughter that had me doubled over, clutching my aching ribs to get enough air. Trans people are just that; people. We are just like anyone else. We do not want to destroy the government or assault women, and we are not brainwashed or sexually abused. We want to be happy. We want to be loved. We want to live.

ILLUSTRATED

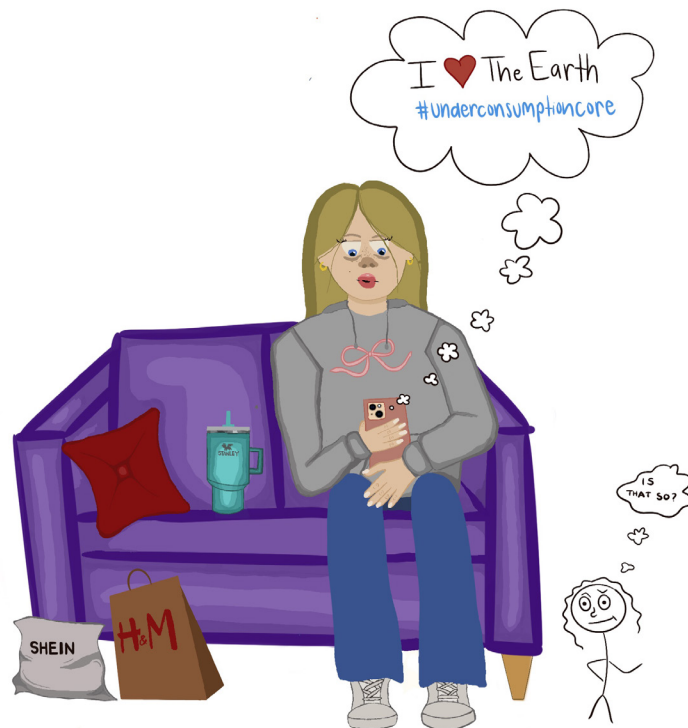


**Evacuation Warning:
Gather Loved Ones,
Pets, and Supplies**

**Sof Cerruti | Senior
Graphics Editor**

Internet Activism

**Zinnia Khan | DEIB
Director**

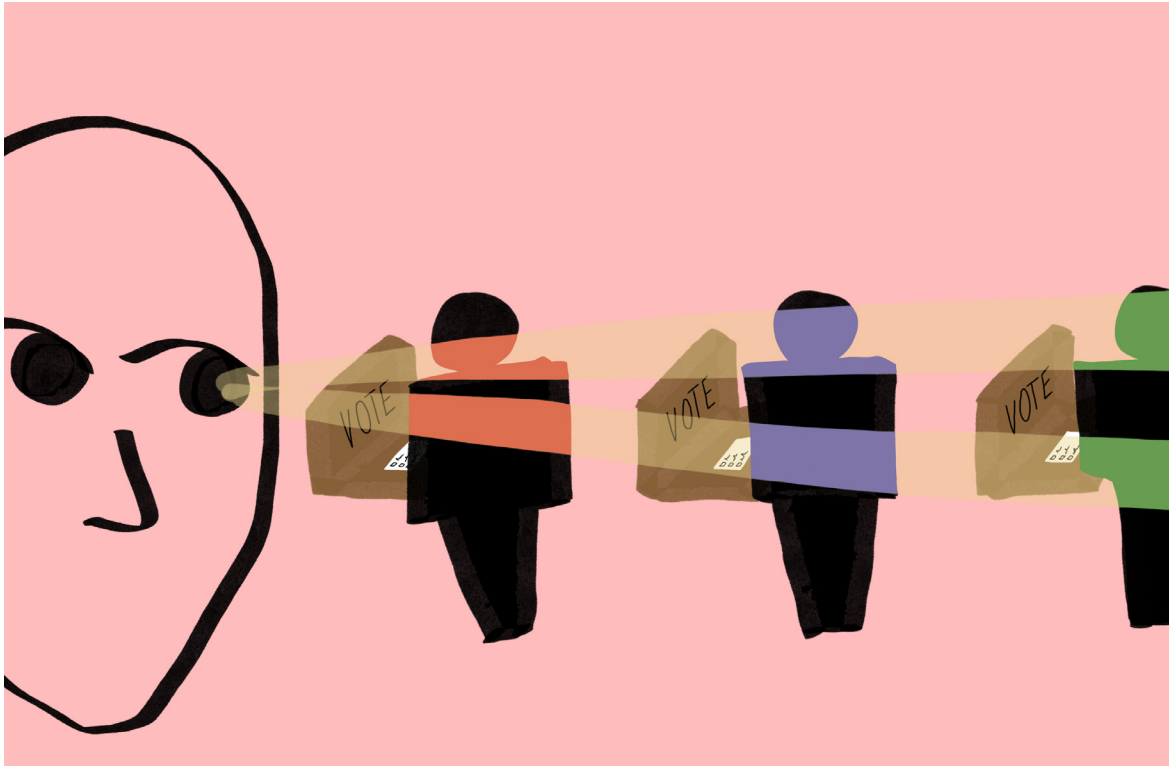


OPINIONS

Escaping the Herd

Exploring the causes and consequences of decreased political involvement

Sof Cerruti | Senior Graphics Editor



Graphic by Audrey Martin

On the day of the 2024 election, I was working a 15 hour shift at a polling center three minutes from my house. There were fewer than 15 of us working who had decided to dedicate our Tuesday to ensuring this important process ran smoothly. None of us knew each other even a little bit, but we understood that we all had some small common interest that drew us to the same place.

We were practicing acting on our values by protecting a democratic institution that was important to us. There is something so fulfilling about pursuing something of personal interest, even more so when it helps so many other people along the way. Standing up for what I believe in can be pretty hard at times, but this time it was one of the easiest things I have ever done. On top of that, the whole experience made me realize how much I actually am interested in politics and related topics.

Unfortunately, not all Americans share this interest in politics. According to a Pew Research survey, only 35 percent

of Americans report high engagement in politics. The survey classified “high engagement” as staying active in current news and frequently discussing politics with others, which seems like the bare minimum for being involved in our democracy. The other 65 percent may not be more involved than simply casting their vote.

This disinterest stems from the education voters receive. In an article published in Princeton’s Annual Review, researchers Claire Willeck and Tali Mendelberg report that “the link between education and political engagement is among the most replicated and cited findings in political science.”

However, the importance of education lies not only in giving young Americans enough information to be able to participate in political processes. Researchers found active social participation in school lessons to be a stronger bridge to political participation. In other words, it is one thing for students to mindlessly copy down information and regurgitate it on a test. Alternatively,

having those students discuss what they learned and form opinions about it creates students who are more passionate about politics and more likely to be politically active.

Active participation in school has plummeted due to factors like COVID-19 and artificial intelligence (AI). When schools switched from in-person instruction to Zoom calls and online learning during the COVID-19 quarantines, students’ ability to engage in discussions significantly declined. Students listened to the ideas of their teachers instead of forming their own, and interest in school generally dropped. Even since schools have transitioned back to the regular classroom settings, this disinterest remains prevalent. According to the National Center for Education statistics, 84 percent of public schools reported that the pandemic negatively impacted student behavior, and 72 percent reported chronic absenteeism among students.

Lack of interest in school is exacerbated by AI programs like ChatGPT that

enable students to summarize sources, outline essays and projects, and even do their work for them. Through these uses, AI can complete the assignments that may have led a student to generate and defend their own opinion. Additionally, they reduce important assignments that students could learn principle skills from to busy work, making many kids apathetic about school and its importance.

When students receive an education and are encouraged to formulate their own opinions, it provides a line of defense against the misinformation and propaganda they may encounter. It is so easy to see a reel, tweet, post, or even pin that says one thing about a major political party and agree with it. Once that gets liked, shared, or even viewed for over four seconds, those ideas can make their way into a person's feed steadily, until they have accidentally, and maybe even unconsciously, identified with a side of politics.

Take the recent TikTok ban and its near-immediate reinstatement. The app broadcasted that its reinstatement was "a result of President Trump's efforts." This message only tells one part of a larger story, excluding how President Trump attempted to ban the app

during the first term of his presidency. This exemplifies how important research and education are and how easy it is to form an opinion based on what one is told.

In a world where any information, true or false, is available at will, it has become a sort of norm to believe the first thing that pops up on your feed. Now, people always say 'don't believe everything you see on the internet,' and almost no one follows their own advice. I know there have absolutely been times when I say, 'oh I read something the other day that said...' and I am literally referencing an Instagram reel. We are all part of the problem, but it is much easier to become a part of the solution than many think.

While aligning with a certain side of a topic we are confronted with may feel like we are engaging in political discussion, true political activism lies in forging our own opinions by involving ourselves in current topics. Simply following the herd and believing what we see, similarly to how students copy down the words of their teachers, does not elicit change in society. A large component of political activism is pushing for progress.

While getting involved may seem like a daunting task, most of the information lies at our fingertips. The trick lies in visiting diverse sources to prohibit a certain side from creating an opinion for you. Organizations such as AllSides and League of Women Voters compose graphs showing where on the political spectrum large news networks and papers lie and can help you ensure you are not a victim of biased news.

Despite its dangers, social media can act as a positive force in political spheres. Online platforms can help you find ways to get involved to practice your personally curated beliefs and connect with others who share similar ideas. One must first form their own opinions and then find their people instead of letting others tell them what group they should be a part of.

Being politically active is an art that is becoming lost on people across the country. However, it is an art that can be both taught and easily learned if people put just a little bit of time into it. For the sake of the nation as a whole and every individual, please care enough to take even just a minute to reflect on your political affiliation and the journey you have taken to get there.

Blueprint Graphic/Neve Murphy



SPORTS



Ready for Rugby

New rugby team creates opportunity for students to explore club sports

Nico Roig, Arman Craig, and Shiraz Kamran | Print Sports Editor,
Online Editor, and Staff Writer

Photo by Isaac Topp

The sound of cleats sprinting across the cabbage patch and the clash of determined players fill the air as a new club rugby team makes its mark in the Lamorinda community. This year, students and community members have come together to establish the club.

Community members have introduced a new club rugby team to Acalanes this year, providing students with the opportunity to participate in a growing sport focused on teamwork and athleticism. The addition of a rugby team marks a significant expansion of sports offerings, aiming to engage more students in competitive activities.

The rugby team was added as an option for students due in part to the hard work of students campaigning for its addition.

"The project was mainly led and put together by Matt Welton and Andrew Parrott as well as students Will Miller*,

Danny Dunne, Graham Helton, and myself," team captain and junior Thomas Parrott said.

Although the rugby team is only made up of Acalanes students, the club is not technically affiliated with the school.

"Rugby and any sports similar to that that are not a high school sport ... would have to operate as an outside user. They could use our facilities, but they would have ... [to] pay rental for the facilities," Athletic Director Randy Takahashi said.

The team goes by the name "Dons Rugby," and features a logo with a different "A" than the traditional Acalanes logo.

During the planning process of creating the club, there were conversations in the district as to the logistics of adding a sport. One such issue was the lack of participation from other schools.

"[Rugby is not a sport] that's competitive within the North Coast Section.

There's just not enough schools that have teams. And ... the district doesn't ... actually recognize rugby as an athletic program," Takahashi said.

Another unique detail about rugby's season schedule is that it does not follow a traditional season timeline like most other sports.

"[Rugby goes] through the winter and spring. And so they've actually already started ... [and have] already had some scrimmages, and so they're already in their competitive season ... It's not like in our season structure where there's a fall, winter, spring. They are going by ... this outside league [schedule]," Takahashi said.

The new program has already set up scrimmages and games with other schools that have added rugby teams to their own programs.

"We have arranged to play multiple different schools including De la Salle, Bishop O'Dowd, Serra, Dublin, and others. There are a lot of private schools with teams but not a lot of public schools," junior Thomas Parrott said.

So far, the program has had two games. On Jan. 18, they defeated Dublin High School 28-22 and on Jan. 25, shut down Bishop O'Dowd High School 40-12.

"We've played one pre-season scrimmage game and one real game. We've won both, so [we are] 2-0 so far," sophomore Daniel Dunne said.

Looking ahead to the rest of the year, the rugby team has set some goals for themselves in the first season of this program.

"What I'm most looking forward to this upcoming season is that we have a ... really good group of kids on our team, and I'm just looking forward to seeing how much we progress throughout the season because we've got a really good set of boys this year," Dunne said.

In the future, the rugby team hopes to grow and become a well-known and successful program amongst those in the Lamorinda community.

"I hope it'll turn into something that gets popular at Acalanes. It would be cool to see a lot of people interested in playing the sport, as it's not really that popular around here," junior Bryce Birdsong said.

***Blueprint would like to acknowledge that Will Miller is a member of Blueprint staff.**

Bidding Farewell to Coach Scott

Acalanes comes together to honor the legacy of women's basketball Assistant Coach Scott Espinosa-Brown

Donovan McGrath and Cypress Reid | Business/Community Outreach Team
Member and Social Media Manager and Staff Writer

Spread by Cade McCalister

Courtesy Photo by Katherine Espinosa-Brown



After a four-year-long fight against cancer, women's basketball Assistant Coach Scott Espinosa-Brown, 'Coach Scott', passed away the morning of Jan. 5 at age 69, leaving behind a legacy of kindness, community, and dedication.

Coach Scott began his career teaching at Doris Eaton and Seven Hills School for nearly 38 years. In the 1980s and 1990s, he coached varsity women's basketball at Campolindo High School where he led the team to three state championships. He then went to coach at Carondelet, where he began working with Margaret Gartner, the current Acalanes varsity women's basketball Head Coach.

"He joined my staff at Carondelet, where he served as an assistant coach for eight to nine years. After both of us took a break from high school coaching, he came back to join me at Acalanes High School four years ago, continuing his legacy of mentorship and coaching excellence," Gartner said.

Coach Scott demonstrated his resilience and dedication in the latter years of his life, pushing himself to spend all the time he had left with his friends and family.

"[He] was told at the beginning of his cancer period that he only had one or two years to live, and he just didn't accept that as his reality. He took care of himself as best he could, believing that he could stretch that out even longer so he could be with his family and be with his players even longer," former women's basketball assistant coach and Coach Scott's son-in-law David Dean said.

Despite the struggles Coach Scott faced during his cancer treatment, he continued to consistently show care for his family, friends, and players.

"We'd go over there every week or two to hang out, and he just really checked in with me to see how I was doing. [He] looked me in the eye, and he showed that he cared about me and wanted to make sure that I was doing okay, and he did that for ten years. I think just that consistency, like 'here's somebody who has your back' always felt really meaningful to me," Dean said.



Coach Scott went above and beyond as a coach, not only coaching his players but empowering them through his motivational words and helping them reach their full potential.

"I was so scared of coming to my first practice, and I was way shorter than all the other girls, I still am, but he pulled out an imaginary cape, and he put it on my shoulders, and he [said] your height is your superpower, you can utilize it in so many different ways, and he ... taught all the girls confidence," varsity women's basketball player and senior Natalie Frechman said.

Coach Scott went further than the duties of a coach, creating a sense of family within the team, and putting aside his personal battle to help his players.

"He acted like we were his own kids, he would refer to us as 'his girls,' he would always offer, 'if you ever need a ride you can call me no questions asked I'll give you a ride', even though he was so old and he was battling cancer he

would put that aside for us, he'd always welcome us to his home," Frechman said.

During practice, Coach Scott aided players and coaches in unlocking hidden strength, grit, and compassion, pushing them to greatness.

"He was a friend first, but a demanding coach second. He had a way of making you believe that anything was possible, even when the odds seemed impossible. His belief in us, especially in tough moments, was a driving force that made us all push harder," Gartner said.

Although he was stern as a coach, Coach Scott also knew how to have fun and enjoy the team's successes.

"After we won games, especially home games, we'd go in the Ice Box and make a dance circle, and Coach Scott would dance right in the middle and throw his hands up, and he was so happy. That was one of my best memories," women's basketball team captain and senior Karyss Lacanlale said.

Coach Scott was a powerful and good-hearted man whose actions have inspired players and community members across the district.

"He inspired me to pursue what I love with passion, joy, and a sense of purpose. Through him, I learned the importance of living life with heart and conviction," Gartner said.

The legacy of Coach Scott will never be forgotten, and his impact will live on through the women's basketball program forever. The team faced off against Heritage High School on Jan. 8, dedicating the game to Coach Scott. The team now wears patches on their jerseys with the initials "SEB" as a way to carry him with them onto the court each time they play.



Extra Time On the Clock

Explaining and exploring the implications behind the NCAA's latest eligibility ruling

Cameron Thornton | Print Sports Editor
Spread by Audrey Martin

It is not uncommon to turn on the television to watch sports and see athletes in their mid to late twenties competing for collegiate titles. However, it was not always like this. With COVID-19 allowing an extra season of eligibility for many, athletes are spending more time than the usual four years in college. The fact is that college athletes are simply getting older, and a recent National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) eligibility ruling may escalate this phenomenon.

In November 2024, Vanderbilt quarterback Diego Pavia filed a lawsuit against the NCAA, claiming that the NCAA's rules regarding athletic eligibility were unfair to junior college athletes. Pavia himself spent two years at Mexico Military Institute, a junior college, before playing at New Mexico State, then transferring to Vanderbilt, using his last season of eligibility in this past college football season.

The original NCAA rule stated that athletes have five years to complete four seasons of eligibility, including any seasons spent playing at the junior college level. Redshirt seasons and seasons cut short because of significant injury, do not count toward an athlete's four seasons of eligibility. Under this rule, Pavia's four seasons of eligibility would be up, however, the injunction, granted in December, makes him eligible to play in the upcoming 2025-2026 college football season.

The NCAA then extended this ruling to encompass the entirety of Division I (D-I) athletes who are in similar situations to Pavia: those who attended junior college for at least a year and would be ineligible to play following the 2024-2025 season.

lowing the 2024-2025 season.

For now, this ruling only extends eligibility for the upcoming 2025-2026 season, but there is the possibility of it becoming permanent. If it were to be fixed permanently in the NCAA rulebook, all athletes would maintain four seasons of collegiate eligibility upon entering a four-year university, whether or not they competed at a junior college previously.

Pavia's lawyers argued that junior college seasons should not be valued the same as NCAA seasons due to the difference in opportunity and benefits. They specifically cited the fact that junior collegiate athletes do not have the same opportunities to earn money from Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) deals or have the same amounts of television exposure.

With the growth of NIL deals in recent years, the money gained from NIL is one of the most impactful incentives for athletes, including Pavia, to stay in college as long as possible. Pavia estimates that he will make over one million dollars in NIL deals in the 2025-2026 college football season. Although he has expressed desires to eventually play professionally, Pavia is not a top National Football League (NFL) prospect, and if drafted, would not receive a multi-million dollar deal like those given to first-round draft picks. Therefore, he will most likely make more money in the upcoming college season than if he entered the NFL.

This is the reality for many college athletes but is especially true for female athletes. A prime example of this is women's basketball, as the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) players infamously receive little pay.

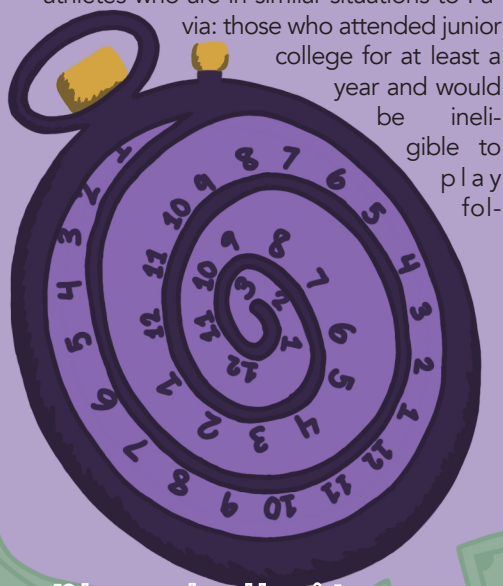
Caitlyn Clark, the number one pick in the 2024 WNBA draft, signed a \$338,056, four-year deal with the Indiana Fever, earning \$76,535 in her first season. In contrast, she earned \$3.1 million in NIL deals during her senior season at Iowa. Although Clark has made a lot of money from brand deals and advertisements during her professional career, there is a clear disparity between NIL earning potential and professional salaries.

Although it benefits athletes who transfer from junior colleges, if this ruling were to become permanent, there would be heavy implications for high school recruits. Many high school athletes will have to reconsider their path to playing collegiate sports as roster spots are increasingly taken by bigger, stronger, and more experienced junior college athletes. If the ruling is made permanent, large programs will be more likely to invest in junior college athletes who can give these schools four seasons of competing.

It is already very difficult for high school athletes to make it to the collegiate level, and the new eligibility ruling would weaken these chances. According to an NCAA study from 2018, only one percent of high school basketball players went on to play at a D-I program immediately following their senior year, while 14.8 percent of junior college players went on to play at a D-I program. These numbers will likely change in favor of junior college athletes if the new rule is instated.

Changing eligibility rules is not the only factor making it more difficult for high school athletes to reach the collegiate level. Beginning in the 2025-2026 academic year, the NCAA will be instating a new roster limit and scholarship cap rule. While the number of scholarships D-I schools are allowed to give will increase, roster spots will decrease for many sports. This will be especially impactful for football, as the average roster size of 128 players will be cut down to a limit of 105 players per team. The limited availability of roster spots this new rule creates may be another push factor for high school athletes to go the junior college route.

The prospect of the new NCAA eligibility rule becoming permanent would alter the face of collegiate sports and the paths of numerous high school athletes. Although the new rule would benefit junior college athletes at the expense of high school athletes, more athletes going to junior college prior to a four-year institution may not be a negative change. Extended eligibility would allow junior college athletes to enter their D-I collegiate careers with more preparation time and overall experience. As the NCAA is flooded with older athletes, viewers may be able to experience a more competitive atmosphere and increased level of play, while the players gain four years of collegiate benefits.





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SPORTS BEATS

Men's Basketball

Will Miller | Staff Writer



Courtesy Photo/Nicole Malm
Joe Reidenbach shoots a free throw against Serra.

The men's basketball team is off to a blazing hot start (18-5 overall, 8-1 league) and sets their sights on a deep North Coast Section playoff run.

The Dons defeated the Northgate Broncos 60-40 on Jan. 15. The team then traveled to Marin Catholic on Jan. 18 and secured a double-digit victory, 56-42, over the Wildcats.

Traveling to Alhambra on Jan. 22, the Dons defeated the Bulldogs with a commanding 64-52 win.

The Campolindo Cougars defeated the Dons 57-37 on Jan. 24, marking their first loss in league play.

The men's basketball coaching staff emphasizes the importance of teamwork, effort, and supporting one another on the court to achieve success.

"I don't put a lot of stuff in [the players'] heads that they can't control. We can't control how many points we're gonna score, can't control how many points the other team is going to score, outside of executing and doing what we are going to do," Head Coach Bill Powers said.

Men's Soccer

Mika Katznelson | Staff Writer



Courtesy Photo/Eric Morford
Santi Vignoles takes the ball upfield.

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The men's soccer team (11-3-2 overall, 4-3 league) has shown a dominant start to their season, with an overall winning record.

They won their first league game against Mt. Diablo 3-0 on Jan. 8 after senior Ben Pecci* scored off of a corner kick from senior Jonny Roth, and junior Omri Norman scored with an assist from senior Simon Appel.

After that, on Jan. 14, they won against Las Lomas (2-0), with seniors Jeremy Lara and Colby Ebner scoring on assists from Pecci.

The team suffered their first losses of the season to Clayton Valley 5-0 on Jan. 16, Campolindo 2-1 on Jan. 21, and Northgate 2-1 on Jan. 23. They face all three of these teams later in the season, with goals to avenge these initial losses.

Even with the ups and downs of their season, players are still committed to winning North Coast Section (NCS).

"This year I think we've been the strongest in the past four years. I think [winning NCS is] very attainable this year," Roth said.

***Blueprint would like to acknowledge that Ben Pecci is related to Natalie Pecci, a member of Blueprint staff.**

Women's Basketball

James Hanzel | Staff Writer



Blueprint Photo/Haley Chelemedos
Ariana Hallstrom puts up a layup against Clayton Valley.

As the women's basketball team (22-1 overall, 8-0 league) continues to cruise through their season, they seek to achieve their goals of a league title, a North Coast Section (NCS) championship, and a run at the

state championship.

On Jan. 3, the team suffered their first defeat of the season to South Medford of Oregon in a close game that ended 63-68.

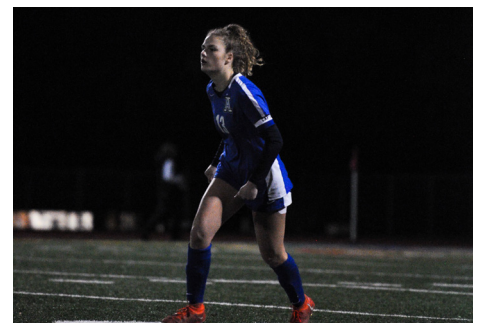
The team bounced back and opened league play against Berean Christian on Jan. 10, dominating the Eagles 87-19. The Dons took care of Las Lomas on Jan. 13, winning 85-26, and followed that up with another dominating win against Northgate on Jan. 15 with a score of 76-24. The team continued their league dominance, beating Alhambra 79-20 on Jan. 22 and Campolindo 77-31 on Jan. 24.

The team's upperclassmen have led, inspired, and encouraged their teammates over the course of the season.

"I think since we have a lot of upperclassmen on our team we've been able to help our younger class which is starting to grow our chemistry and it will be beneficial for us going into the playoffs," team captain and senior Karyss Lacanlale said.

Women's Soccer

Natalie Pecci | Staff Writer



Blueprint Photo/Audrey Martin
Tori Hiatt looks upfield in a match against Miramonte.

After a difficult start to the season, the women's soccer team (6-2-4 overall, 3-1 league) is kicking into high gear with the start of league games.

On Dec. 9, the Dons faced off against Bishop O'Dowd, coming up just short with a 1-1 tie. However, on Dec. 11, the Dons rebounded and defeated Maria Carrillo 2-1 and shut out Clayton Valley 2-0 on Jan. 9. On Jan. 11 they battled against California High School, resulting in a 3-3 tie. Facing Benicia,

the team showed a dominant performance, with a 4-0 shutout.

On Jan. 17 the team battled against Northgate with seven shots on goal and a 2-2 tie. The team shut out their rivals Miramonte 1-0 on Jan. 23 and Campolindo 2-0 on Jan. 25. The team continued to dominate on Jan 27 against Alameda with a 5-1 win.

Unfortunately, the team's winning streak came to an end with a tough 3-1 loss against Las Lomas on Jan. 30.

Moving forward, the team has high hopes for the rest of the season.

"I think each game will be a battle, but if we all play our best we will have no issue winning," team captain and senior Lucca Debiasse said.

Wrestling

Saaj Shah | Online Editor



Blueprint Photo/Audrey Martin
Hugo Detorres wins his match against Ygnacio Valley.

The Acalanes varsity wrestling team is continuing the season strong to win future matches and learn new skills through both experience and practice.

One of the key aspects that members of the team are looking forward to was progressing their talents through match experience.

"I am looking forward to continuing to grow as a player and learn new skills to use during matches," junior Gabe Van Houten said.

This year, there were many changes, including underdog wins and new members taking an interest in the sport.

"We have a lot of first year wrestlers having to step up into the varsity line-up when we have league duals. Definitely not ideal but if they all stick with it the team has a lot of potential to be good," Head Coach Steven Nelsen said.



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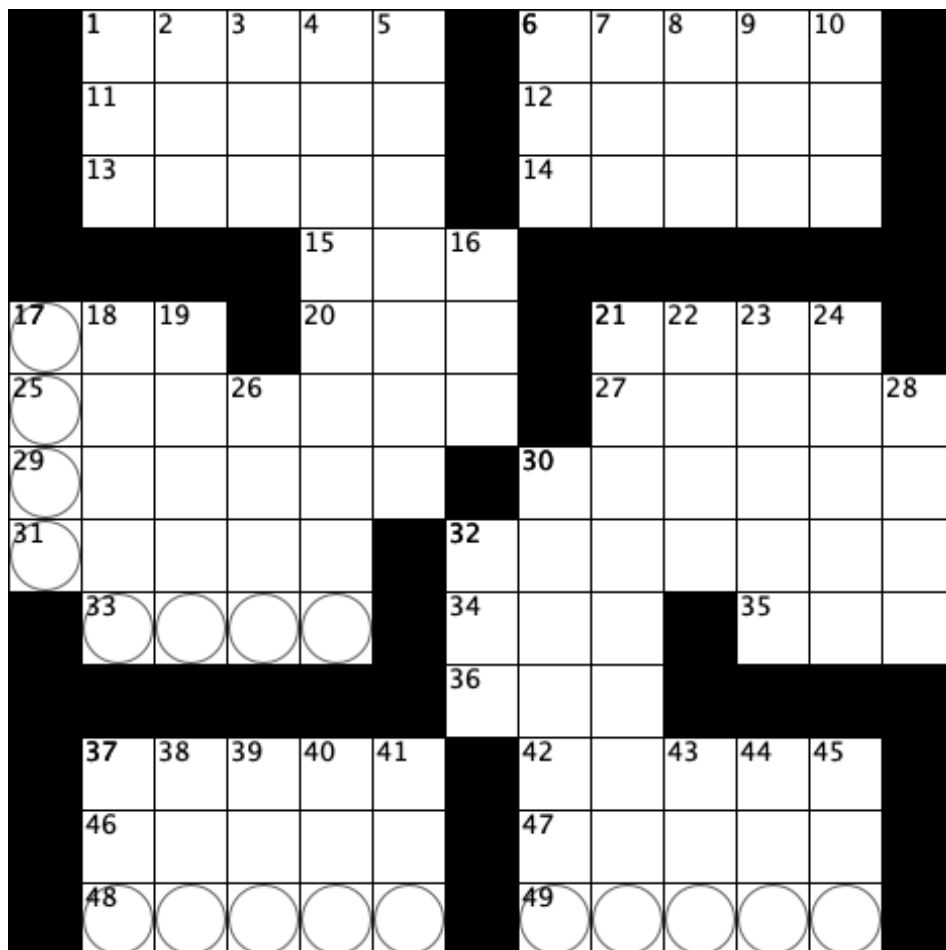
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Crossword

Created by Neve Murphy, Nico Roig, and Sameed Marco | Head Cruciverbalists

In light of snow season, look out for some ski related words!



Across

1. Sheep's young
6. Alternative to streaming
11. The Earth spins on __ _____
12. The Bessemer process revolutionized _____ production
13. Row boat
14. Function of arrow buttons when texting
15. Raw form of iron or coal
17. Once around a track is a _____
20. Mark of the end of a sentence
21. SAT _____ classes
25. Foolish or stupid
27. Mr. Nobody's successor in *Fast and Furious*

29. Jean style similar to bootcut
30. Capital of Kazakhstan
31. Prongs on a fork
32. *The _____ Race*, CBS Show
33. Trunk, in London
34. Taylor Swift's 4th album
35. Soap making ingredient
36. Plural of "is"
37. _____ Reese, WNBA player
42. Independent music genre
46. To mock
47. Egypt's capital
48. Telephone wires are supported by these
49. Colorado ski town

Down

1. Justin Herbert is the QB of this team
2. Revision of ETA
3. Opposite of max.
4. One might take this to check their ferritin levels
5. Performance enhancing drugs
6. Computer programming lang.
7. What 7 did to 9
8. _____ and Jerry's Ice Cream
9. Energy efficient light bulb (abbr.)
10. Ernie _____, famous golfer
16. List ending abbreviation
17. Elevator, in Manchester
18. To improvise
19. Grand or upright _____
21. 90s British R&B group
22. _____ -Carlton, five-star hotel chain
23. Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo, for example
24. Least valuable coin
26. Milk's favorite cookie
28. Burning this is believed to ward off bad spirits
30. Simon & Garfunkel song featured in *Almost Famous*
32. Astounding
37. Cell's energy source (abbr.)
38. Prefix for new
39. _____ Gadot, Wonder Woman
40. Right, down, right, on a map (abbr.)
41. _____ Schwab Tires
43. Seven-layer _____
44. Extreme anger
45. Long, indefinite period of time



Check Blueprint
Online for cross-
word answers!

ATHLETES OF THE ISSUE



Jonny Roth/Courtesy Photo
Jonny Roth receives a pass.

Jonny Roth

Jake Colaco | Head Section Editor

The men's soccer team (11-3-1 overall, 4-3 league) continues to dominate the competition due largely to the leadership of senior captain Jonny Roth. The midfielder has played a significant role for the past four years and looks to continue propelling the team through his final season.

Roth's performance on the field has been a spectacle for the Dons. His ability to transition the ball from defense to offense helps the team win games.

"He is a field manager from the center of the field and distributes the ball, moving it up the field," senior Ben Pecci said.

To improve his performance on the field, Roth has put in significant hours in the off-season and away from Acalanes. His coaches and teammates recognize his hard work and commemorate him for continuing to put in countless time perfecting his craft.

"Jonny is on a club soccer team which is a primary focus of his during the high school off-season. They train [three to four] times a week, have regionally based matches on the weekends, and occasionally travel to other states. As well, Jonny is on the State Olympic Development team, and he travels nationally for that commitment," Head Coach Paul Curtis said.

Roth has significantly improved the team's morale and discipline in practice and games. His consistent leadership has kept all players motivated and persistent in working toward a common goal.

"Jonny is in charge of motivating seniors and keeping control of the group. He makes sure the team is focused on the team goal from top to bottom," Pecci said.

Although the team will miss Roth's presence after this season, the coaches believe he has left a lasting impression on the program that will be seen in his teammates. He has shown strong dedication to the sport and helping the team improve and play the right way.

"Jonny leads by example with a high work rate. He displays good sportsmanship and encourages his teammates toward success," Curtis said.

Tori Hiatt

Sophie Chinn | Online Editor-In-Chief

The women's soccer team (6-2-4 overall, 3-1 league) has kicked off their season with impressive momentum, led by junior outside defender Tori Hiatt, whose skill and leadership have been instrumental in the team's success on the field.

Hiatt's dedication to perfecting her craft extends far beyond Acalanes soccer.

"Tori plays on a very competitive club team. She also does a lot of training on her own, it is not uncommon to see her stay after practice to do extra conditioning, sprints, and ball work. She also does weight training," Head Coach Alex Avelar said.

In addition to her hard work, Hiatt's experience and leadership are pivotal in strengthening the team's bond and on-field chemistry.

"She leads the team and always helps others because she is a smart player. She is always vocal on the field and communicates well. Tori is very welcoming to all the underclassmen. She encourages them with a positive mindset and is always reassuring. Tori gets along with everyone and always brings the best energy to the team," senior Lucca Debiasse said.

Hiatt's leadership matches her exceptional soccer skills and ability to thrive in high-pressure situations.

"Her position is extremely demanding. She normally has to match up with the fastest, most dynamic player on the opposing team. She always shuts them down while contributing on offense," Avelar said.

As the Dons wrap up their regular season and prepare for the postseason, Hiatt's contributions will be key to the team's determination and accomplishments.

"Tori always makes those around her better by relying heavily on teamwork. She is also a great defender whom the team completely trusts to do her job. She is assertive in the way that she commands the team and can help us to a win," senior Demi Woods said.



Audrey Martin/Blueprint Photo
Tori Hiatt sprints upfield.

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